

RESOLVING CHURCH CONFLICTS
THROUGH PEACE, HEALING
AND RECONCILIATION

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ABSTRACT

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The objective of this project is to help the Belfast United Methodist Church congregation understand issues that led to past conflicts within the congregation, and resolve future conflicts based on teachings of healing, peace and reconciliation. This will be achieved through focus group sessions to include questionnaires, biblical conflict discussions, workshop exercises, teachings on conflict resolutions, and constructive ways of addressing future conflicts. Through this collaborative effort, the members will develop an awareness of the possible harm of church conflicts. They will turn to the Bible as the primary source in understanding and employing healthy ways of managing church disagreements.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this Doctor of Ministry project would not have been possible without many persons who rendered their advice, guidance and support during the journey. The writer is especially thankful to Dr. Harold Hudson who, through his initial consultation and brief tenure as a mentor, spent considerable time and effort helping in framing the vision in pursuit of this spiritual and academic calling. His kind, inspiring and motivating words provided comfort and assurance throughout the program, especially during the early stages.

The faith community of Belfast United Methodist Church, Goshen, Ohio was a major entity in the completion of the program. A number of members eagerly volunteered in welcoming and embracing the project, and were eager to find healthy ways to use the results of the project to help them understand the past problems in the church family and learn ways to prevent recurring harm to the church. They made necessary sacrifices in the giving of their time and participation in the completion of the study sessions, field exercises and workshops.

The writer is thankful for the passion, commitment and guidance of his mentors Dr. Hairston and Dr. Dalton. Their constant concern, constructive observations, and words of wisdom were a continuous source of energy and inspiration. Their oversight served as constant reminders to seek the necessary resources and professional assistance in meeting the standards of research, writing and interpretation of data. He is thankful for

the assistance and support of professional associates Dr. Frederick Wright, Dr. Randy Lowe, Tracy Reed-Kessler, Ph.D., and LaVerne Armstrong, who joined with Dr. Reed Kessler in providing invaluable assistance as a facilitator in the completion of the context fieldwork.

The writer is also thankful for his colleagues and peer associates who shared their experiences and advice that facilitated his learning. He is grateful to Denise Gilmore and Stacie Wilson, who served as cheerleaders, read and analyzed his work, and provided insightful and constructive feedback. Last but not least,

I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus¹ (1 Tim. 1:12-13).

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

DEDICATION

The paper is dedicated to the writer's second grade teacher, Eliza Walker-Mills. Throughout his life, her teaching, encouragement, advice, love, and model of forgiveness served as a constant companion.

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this project will explore church conflicts, their causes, and possible avenues for resolutions. Conflicts are known to exist from the beginning of human existence. There were conflicts in the lives of Adam and Eve; Abraham and Sarah; and in the life of David. Jesus went to the cross based on conflicts. These realities are convincing evidence that conflicts are inevitable.

The early followers of Christ, as a mirror of society, inherently experienced a variety of conflicts. Whereas conflicts have the capacity for harm and destruction, they also have the capacity for good. Conflicts may serve as indicators of the desire for growth. The results will depend on the handling or managing of the conflict, especially in the church. The outcome of conflicts depends on the skills and the desire to use constructive methods in addressing any disagreement. Most importantly, the methods involve a change of heart, and “this can only -be done when the heart is set first on Christ.”¹

Although that mandate is clear throughout scripture, church disagreements are common, and often serve as the spark in the destruction of congregations. This happens because unresolved conflicts continue for generations, often resulting in anger, hostility, and the dismantling or splitting of congregations. The major challenge involves breaking the cycle of unresolved conflicts. This involves biblical teachings that will help congregations become aware of the cause of conflicts, including personal involvement,

¹ Dave Peters, *Surviving Church Conflict* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1997), 20.

and how unresolved conflicts do not reflect godly living. Breaking the cycle also includes teaching and promoting attitudes of peace, healing and reconciliation.

In this project, the writer will present a plan that will serve as a conduit in achieving the stated goal. The completion of that plan will utilize the collaborative model that involves the participation of various members of Belfast United Methodist Church. Through the collaborative model, the congregation will share the authorship of the plan, including insight into the root of disagreements, as well as gaining a clear understanding of healthy alternatives in responding to conflicts.

In Chapter One the writer summarizes his spiritual journey, including experiences and circumstances that played a role in the selection of this project. The chapter reviews the ministry context, including the demographics of Belfast United Methodist Church and surrounding communities. The chapter clearly communicates to the reader the basis for the project, the role of the writer, research and data collection techniques, and the expected outcome for the ministry.

Chapter Two will explore writings and literature presented by earlier writers throughout time relating to the topic. The chapter will explore any thoughts or concepts on the subject that may have evolved through time. The chapter will examine the impact of prior literature in addressing the concept of peace, healing and reconciliation.

Chapter Three provides the reader with an in-depth analysis of the biblical, historical and theological concepts of the ministry project. The chapter will include a thorough examination how Scripture and Spirituality connect to the project. The chapter will provide give a clear understanding of the spiritual autobiography of the writer, the

ministry context, and the researched literature, which will serve as a bridge to Chapter Four.

Chapter Four describes the methodology and research design for guiding the project. The chapter provides a specific plan of action in completing the study. The chapter clearly explains the use of the focus group, pre and post-tests, group discussions, and biblical studies data in gaining an understanding of challenges in resolving church conflicts.

Chapter Five includes comprehensive results of the research, including the data collected and an interpretation of data. The writer presents the audience with a clear understanding of the design and how its use can be used by other churches used in resolving church conflicts. The chapter will also include conflicts experienced during the focus groups sessions, and adjustments made in response to the conflicts.

Chapter Six summarizes the project and provides a clear pattern for use by other churches. The writer presents commentary supporting the significance of the project, and recommendations for possible adjustments in the research process. The writer addresses the growing trend of church conflicts and why the design is necessary in bringing peace, healing and reconciliation.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The ministry focus of this project addresses the need to educate churches on the subject of conflicts, and the destruction conflicts often cause every church. The writer believes conflicts are inevitable, a normal part of living, and inherent throughout every organization and institution of society. In reality, whenever there is a disagreement, conflict exists. They are not restricted to any social, economic, cultural or gender group. Although conflicts may result in harm and destruction, they are not always negative or harmful. Conflicts may take the form of the children's game of "tug of war" to the more sophisticated use of warfare between powerful nations.

The church, as a mirror of society, is not immune from conflicts. When conflicts are not adequately handled, the church usually fails to take advantage of an opportunity to provide the necessary ministry of healing and Christian growth. In fact, the unresolved conflicts in churches are common, and are known to be the root of severe damage to the church. The writer asserts that churches have not come to accept the premise that negative spirits inside and outside of the congregation have a mission of creating conflicts and destruction. Based on this intentional or unintentional oversight, meaningful steps are often not taken to effectively address conflicts when they occur.

The writer is an African American pastor of Belfast United Methodist Church of Goshen, Ohio. After spending six months evaluating the history of the church, the writer

realized unresolved conflicts are common within the Belfast church. He determined the conflicts were due to the lack of information and guidance relative to meaningful resolution to disagreements. The project was a collaborative effort with Belfast members, who participated in a focus group consisting of discussions and workshops. The discussions and workshops, including biblical conflict examples, were designed to educate the church on the various aspects of church conflicts and conflict resolution.

Spiritual Autobiography

The writer was born the eighth of twelve children to a sharecropper in rural South Carolina. His spiritual life is deeply rooted in the Christian faith and practices of his parents, who mandated weekly church attendance. At the age of six, with eleven children in the home, the writer experienced his first major hardship with the unexpected death of his father. During the next five years of impoverished conditions, the writer sought comfort from a loving family, the church, and the public school system. At the age of eleven, he experienced trauma when his mother left him and his siblings in South Carolina to obtain employment in New York. The role of parent was performed by other teenage siblings, who remained in that role until completion of high school or soon after age reaching his/her eighteenth birthday. These circumstances contributed to increased trauma and anxiety of the writer.

As a child growing up under the laws of legalized segregation, racial, economic and social conflicts were normal in his life. The mental and emotional hardships from the lack of parental supervision gave him further understanding of the negative impact of unresolved conflicts. Those conflicts resulted in his departure from home at age thirteen and returning nine months later. During that separation, his faith in God increased when a

mule saved his life by unpinning him from heavy farm equipment. The hardships and negative experiences of that venture provided additional awareness of unresolved conflicts. However, those experiences did not promote the positive handling of personal conflicts. At age fifteen he relied on that faith as he began a three-year parental role to four siblings. He relied on the church as a source of strength and guidance. However, throughout those years the writer continued to struggle with conflicts experienced in all facets of life: social and racial injustice; siblings and family; communities; and the church. In the church, he witnessed acts of verbal and physical confrontations, including the display of weapons.

After high school, the unresolved conflicts accompanied him during his two-year residency in New York. In 1969, as he prepared to report for induction into the U.S. Army, various events allowed him to be diverted to the U.S. Air Force. Again the writer was reassured of the presence of God. The undesired military induction opened the door for the fulfillment of his childhood dreams to serve as a mail carrier, policeman and preacher. In 1973, after four years on active duty the writer began employment as a mail carrier and enrollment in a university in Topeka, Kansas. After four years of inactivity in the church he returned to the community of faith. The presence of conflicts within several churches and the awareness the behavior of Christians outside the church was a reflection of conflicts experienced years earlier. He used these perceived contradictions as justification to abstain from active involvement in the faith community.

Though his spirit was often weakened, the writer remained rooted in his faith. In 1975 that faith led to his eventual return and uniting with the family of Asbury United Methodist Church in Topeka, Kansas. However there were many wounds in need of

healing. The shooting death of his brother in 1992 created emotional wounds that called out for faith and personal healing. The pain and subsequent healing from that loss resulted in his recommitment to the church. By that time the writer had served ten years in federal law enforcement, and was completing graduate studies in a local university. The many years of his absence from the study of Scripture had left him unprepared to take a meaningful discipleship role. The recommitment to Christ would include his 1993 enrollment in a local Bible Seminary. In 1997 the writer was conferred with a Master of Arts degree and continued his calling to serve as a messenger for Christ. As a member for five years in a European United Methodist Church, he became more familiar with the residual effects of unresolved racial and cultural conflicts. In 1999 his desire to serve the entire body of Christ led to his appointment to pastor a European United Methodist Church in urban Cincinnati, Ohio.

After two years of ministry the writer, realizing the need for additional seminary biblical training, enrolled as a full-time student in a Theological Seminary. In January 2004 he was conferred with a Master of Divinity degree. However, in July 2004 unresolved personal and church political conflicts led to the writer leaving the United Methodist Church to accept ordination in the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. In January 2007 unresolved conflicts resulted in the writer returning to the United Methodist Church as pastor of an African American congregation in an urban African American community in Cincinnati. The appointment revealed deep-rooted unresolved conflicts within the congregation and the community. The writer determined that the conflicts had contributed to the dismantling of the congregation and were inhibiting any significant ministry.

Through the revelations of that ministry, as well as prior experiences and awareness of church conflicts, the writer felt God leading him to address this growing problem. Most importantly, he felt God was using this situation as a method in resolving personal conflict issues. In January 2010, various circumstances and the nudging of God led to his enrollment in the Doctor of Ministry program at United Theological Seminary. Whereas the writer planned to focus his attention on conflicts within the African American church, the hand of God was again evident with a much greater plan. In July 2010 the writer was appointed to serve as pastor of Belfast United Methodist Church some twenty miles east of Cincinnati. He came to realize that prior church and life conflicts had prepared him for the ministry of his assignment at Belfast.

Context Analysis

Belfast United Methodist Church is a European congregation located in a rural and farming community of Goshen, Ohio. The church was established in 1810, and officially chartered in 1870 as Belfast Methodist Episcopal Church. The current membership of eighty-four consists primarily of farmers and/or descendants of farmers who live primarily in four surrounding communities. The summarized demographic information is contained in Appendix A.

The congregation has an extensive history of conflicts, including the period of the Great Depression.¹ The hardships of the Great Depression played a significant role in the future and present ministry, specifically in the area of financial responsibilities. This is

¹ The Great Depression, which lasted for ten years, resulted following the collapse of stock-market prices on the New York Stock Exchange in 1929. The fall of stock prices led to personal investment losses; business losses and bank closings. In addition, there were losses of employment, and personal property. The collapse of the economic industry created enormous hardships throughout American society.

evident by the conflict in 1965 relative to tithing which resulted in divisiveness and the eventual departure of approximately half the membership. Historically, pastors have not been allowed to fulfill their roles as leader and administrative officer of the church.

Verbal arguments and confrontations were common practices within the congregation.

Pastors have been restricted to the primary role of preaching and visiting the sick. These factors limited pastoral ministry effectiveness and may have contributed to the length of their tenure. During the period 1900 thru 1982, thirty-two pastors served the parish for an average period of two and one-half years each.

In July 2010 unresolved conflicts relative to internal issues and denominational differences led to anger, hostility, and the departure of some fifty within three weeks after the appointment of the writer. The departing members represented sixty-percent of the church revenue, which created additional hardships. Although no mention was made of the race or culture of the writer, his ethnicity appears to have been a factor in the departure of some members. As pastor and administrative leader, his task included helping the congregation implement structure and organization outlined in *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church (BOD)*. In addition to serving as a plan of self-governing of Methodists, the *Book of Discipline* includes information and guidelines relative to its constitution, history, doctrinal standards, and processes through which congregations support each other. These factors led to additional conflicts within the congregation.

Nancy Ammerman, in the book *Studying Congregations* explains: "Congregations have their own dynamics of power and patterns of relationship, often like family systems of interdependence. And they operate on assumptions about authority and power that

come both from the larger cultures in which they are located and from their own traditions.”² Prior traditions failed to consider or understand the biblical mandate of making disciples and stewardship; the need for ongoing biblical learning and spiritual growth; and the awareness of the *Book of Discipline*. Even though the goals of the congregation were intended for good, the desire to maintain the status quo provided fuel for destructive conflicts and the loss of a clear biblical mandate.

Kenneth O. Gangel and Samuel L. Canine, in the book *Communication and Conflict Management* say “conflict is a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals.”³ The writer determined that the rivals included church members who were competing for power and control. He determined these factors contributed to unresolved conflicts and divisiveness which usually resulted in negative consequences. The writer, through his personal and church conflicts is able to identify with the circumstances at Belfast. He feels that God has used his prior life experiences in preparing him to make positive contributions to the health of the Belfast church and community.

² Nancy T. Ammerman et al., *Studying Congregations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 16.

³ Kenneth O. Gangel and Samuel L. Canine, *Communication and Conflict Management in Churches and Christian Organizations* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1992), 131.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL

This chapter will focus on literature from known writings and studies relating to the concept of peace, healing and reconciliation. This concept is paramount in sustaining the life of the church due to the presence of conflict, which in part, is fueled by “the oil of the Holy spirit [that] provides a supernatural lubricant not available to secular organizations.”¹ Although church conflicts are not necessarily harmful, injuries and wounds caused by unresolved conflicts often result in church divisiveness. The writer believes that it is only through healing, peace and reconciliation that the church can faithfully serve as a viable faith community.

Church conflicts are not a recent phenomenon. Since creation, humankind has been entrenched in conflicts. Conflicts within the church are historically tied to the first human conflict. In order to understand and respond to the conflict dilemma in the church, it is paramount to study the handling of conflicts by our ancestors. Kenneth Gangel and Samuel Canine, in the book *Communication and Conflict Management* assert, “Perhaps

¹ Kenneth O. Gangel and Samuel L. Canine, *Communication and Conflict Management in Churches and Christian Organizations* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1992), 12.

the most insidious conflict was the internal one. Adam and Eve, and all their offspring would face the struggle or conflict on the inside created by sin.”²

God created Adam and Eve based on the premise of relationship. However, relationships are riddled with conflict from Genesis to Revelation. Although conflicts are evident from biblical history, differences often lead to conflicts in every organization of society. That reality requires constructive steps toward reconciliation. Paul A. Mickey and Robert L. Wilson, in the book *Conflict and Resolution* write, “reconciliation is a matter of mutual recognition that a conflict is ended. Reconciliation is a goal but not the means to a goal.”³

The church, as a mirror of society, inherently experiences disagreements and conflicts. Katharine Sakenfield notes that a “conflict is like running a race while bearing internal inconsistencies, personal suffering, or struggle over particular beliefs.”⁴ The church has a growing need for healthy steps to help congregations remove internal barriers that often harm the health of the church. The historical stories of conflicts in the Bible as well disagreements in the early church and other institutions provide invaluable lessons in conflict resolution. This writing chronicles the various methods used by the church in response to conflicts. The knowledge gained from historical writings gives a greater understanding of the disagreements, and possible approaches for reconciliation. The literature will provide details of historic conflicts for evaluation as to what may work

² Ibid., 155.

³ Paul A. Mickey and Robert L. Wilson, *Conflict and Resolution: A Case Study Approach to Handling Parish Situations* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1973), 16.

⁴ Katharine Doob Sakenfield, ed., *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 717.

in the present context or circumstance. Marc Gopin, in his article “Religion, Violence, and Conflict Resolution” writes, “the replicability of past methods of conflict resolution or determining violence should be a critical concern.”⁵

Biblical

Old Testament

From the beginning, God gave humankind choices—positive or negative. Through the literature of the Old Testament, God availed wisdom to those who demonstrated the understanding of positive choices. The original sin of Adam and Eve is a constant reminder that choices are available in every conflict. Kenneth Gangel and Samuel Canine, in the book *Communication and Conflict Management in Churches and Christian Organizations* emphasized the need to use Scripture as a guide when responding to conflicts. They assert, “the confrontation between sin and righteousness provides a foundational perspective for understanding the history of the Old Testament.”⁶ They further note “since conflict permeates our lives, the issue becomes constructive or destructive management of conflict in specific instances.”⁷ The use of constructive management of conflict by David may be a factor in the extensive scholarly reviews of the conflict between David and King Saul. David, in 1 Samuel 24:7 refers to Saul as “my Lord”, reflecting respect and a promise not to harm the anointed of Yahweh. The good

⁵ Marc Gopin, *Religion, Violence, and Conflict Resolution* [journal on-line] (Fairfax, VA: Peace and Change, 1997); available from <http://www.kent.ac.uk/politics/carc/reading%20group/Religion%20Violence%20and%20Conflict%20Resolution.pdf;Internet> (accessed September 21, 2011).

⁶Gangel and Canine, 155.

⁷Ibid., 165.

will gesture was evidence of the respect David had for the appointed king, and the oath not to harm the Holy God. Rev. Dr. Ralph W. Klein, historian and author of *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Samuel* presents insights from extensive research to avail a greater understanding of the Samuel literature and its meaning to the audience of that day. Klein asserts that David understood the mandate to honor Saul as the anointed King. The decision of David appears to have been based on that understanding. Klein, affirming that premise says “David swore an oath, whose breach would have capital consequences.”⁸

David was known as a skilled hunter and leader of a fierce military unit. He had a number of choices in response to the aggressive acts of Saul. His decision was applauded by Arthur Pink, former evangelist, founder of the magazine “Studies in Scriptures”, and author of *The Life of David*, which illuminates the many sides of David. The book challenges the reader to reflect on the many problems experienced in life. Pink, recognizing the faith of David asks “does faith perceive the hand of God in everything which enters our lives, be it great or small? And it is only as we recognize His hand molding all our circumstances that God is honored, and our hearts are kept in peace.”⁹ The faith of David led him to walk in the way of the Lord. Perhaps David learned the way of the Lord from the sacred stories of Scripture, which includes the story of Hanna ensuring that Samuel, at an early age, was taught the way of the Lord. This teaching is evident in 1 Samuel 1:24 stating “when she had weaned him, she took him up with her,

⁸ Ralph W. Klein, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Samuel*, vol. 10 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 239.

⁹ Arthur W. Pink, *The Life of David* [book online] (Albany, GA: Ages Software, 2000), available from: [http://www.thescripturealone.com/Pink_LifeOfDavid\(1\).PDF](http://www.thescripturealone.com/Pink_LifeOfDavid(1).PDF); Internet (accessed July 11, 2011).

along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine. She brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh.” David walked in the way of the Lord by choosing to honor Saul and waiting for the Lord to render the appropriate decision at the designated time.

His understanding of the way of the Lord is expressed in 1 Samuel 24:8-9 when David “called after Saul, ‘My lord the king!’” David had the opportunity to inflict serious harm or death upon his enemy; instead he cut off the cloak of Saul as an offer of proof of his good will and expression of reconciliation. William Blaikie, former magazine editor and author, including *The First Book of Samuel* containing an exhaustive expository commentary on the life of David notes this act of integrity.

Blaikie wrote, “David had given him [Saul] that day a convincing proof of his integrity; though it seemed that the Lord had delivered him into his hand, he killed him not. He had reversed the principle on which men were accustomed to act when they came upon an enemy and him in his power.”¹⁰ During conflicts, alienation between the various players is a common entity. Whereas the aggressive and violent acts of Saul may have been justification for alienation, David refused to accept separation as an alternative. Instead, in his desire for reconciliation, David employed the motif of rebuilding trust. Blaikie submits that “rebuilding the trust involves focusing on two objectives: 1) to create trust between the people and ourselves, and 2) to create trust in the process we are using even if the two sides can’t trust each other.”¹¹

¹⁰ William G. Blaikie, *The First Book of Samuel* (Minneapolis, MN: Klock and Klock Christian Publishers, 1978), 370.

¹¹ Ibid., 239.

Biblical

New Testament

As Jesus entered the world, evil was very much a part of society. The gospel of Matthew 2:1-8 summarizes the threats against his life by King Herod who was fearful of losing his throne to the newborn king. Jesus entered the world in the midst of a dispute and conflict concerning his identity and purpose. In his book *Engaging the Powers*, Walter Wink examines the concept of evil in the New Testament and how the interaction with evil may create evil within. Wink writes, “neither evil nor violence is a part of the creation, but both enter as a result of the first couple’s sin and the machinations of the serpent.”¹²

Although Jesus accepted the mission to give his life, he proclaimed “do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also” (Mat. 5:39). Scholars and theologians, through their writings in *The New Interpreter’s Bible* have contributed exegetical commentaries analyzing the gospel of Matthew. The writings, in response to the examples of Jesus on conflicts state “the way of non-violence, non-retaliation, love of enemies, is to be pursued to the end.”¹³ His examples of forgiveness, mercy and reconciliation were based on the will of God. The future mission of the disciples would require their interaction with people of various personalities and beliefs. Peter, however, had a reputation of being impulsive, hotheaded and outspoken. His unfavorable behavior was often the fuel for conflicts.

¹² Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 14.

¹³ Neil M. Alexander, ed., *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 8 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 477.

Michael Grant, in his book, *Saint Peter*, utilizes archaeology, anthropology, and historical data from apostles Paul and James in his interpretation of the life of Peter. Grant wrote “despite his human deficiencies and setbacks... Peter was, in last resort, as loyal and faithful to Jesus as human nature permitted him to be.”¹⁴ As Jesus looked forward to the birth of his church, he prepared Peter for the task of handling conflicts. As words of encouragement, Jesus said, “you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church” (Mat. 16:18). The term “rock”, from the Greek word “petra”, used in reference to man means “by reason of his firmness and strength of soul.”¹⁵ As the Roman soldiers and religious leaders converged on Jesus to affect his arrest, the actions of Peter failed to reflect the model of healthy conflict resolution. Peter substituted the model of love, peace and reconciliation with the human response of the flesh: anger and hostility. Grant wrote, “we have seen that Peter was the leading apostle. Yet here he is showing a wretched lack of comprehension.”¹⁶

Jeannine Brown, in her book *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective* employs the motif of narrative criticism in examining the character of Peter and analyzing how he was portrayed. Brown says, “in their mission to Israel, however, the disciples are frequently susceptible to ‘little faith.’”¹⁷ As Jesus prepared his disciples he says to Peter, “you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Mat. 14:31). The promised kingdom of heaven assured

¹⁴ Michael Grant, *Saint Peter* (London, UK: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994), 71.

¹⁵ Michael Tan and Michael Bushell "Bible Works for Windows." Norfolk: Bible Works, LLC, 2001.

¹⁶ Michael Grant, *Saint Peter* (London, UK: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994), 67.

¹⁷ Jeannine K. Brown, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective: The Portrayal and Function of the Matthean Disciples* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 19.

the faithful of eternal rewards. The true assessment of faithfulness is measured during acts of persecution. During the arrest of Jesus, Peter exemplified his little faith by cutting off the ear of a servant of the priest. Warren Carter, in his book *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* presents an exegetical perspective that highlights the possible basis for the hostility of Peter. Carter states, “he [Peter] has not understood either Jesus’ instruction about nonviolent resistance or about his death as the will of God.”¹⁸

Historical

Conflicts are known to grow out of disagreements, which may involve the loss of an expressed need. On the other hand, “not every expressed need is necessarily legitimate or of equal value, but one has to raise the question of who gets to make that determination.”¹⁹ As God provided a home for Adam and Eve in the garden, they were told, “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat” (Gen. 2:17). Adam and Eve perceived a need to eat the forbidden fruit, which was in conflict with the instructions from God. They apparently felt the need for liberation from the doctrine of God. J. Gresham Machen, in his book *Christianity and Liberalism* argues that life is founded on doctrine and presents contrasting viewpoints of liberalism, the church, the Bible, God and man. Machen wrote,

Human existence implies ‘freedom from instinctual determination of... actions,’ which is prerequisite for the development of human culture. The troubling fact, however, is that the two sides of this development, growing power and increasing individuation are not balanced. Consequently, the history of

¹⁸ Warren Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 253.

¹⁹ Frederick C. Tiffany and Sharon H. Ringe, *Biblical Interpretation : A Roadmap* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 146.

humanity is littered with conflict and strife, and ‘each step in the direction of growing individuation [has] threatened people with new insecurities.’²⁰

The early followers differed in their values, beliefs and theology, which resulted in sacrificing their perceived needs. In Acts 15:1 some Judean Christians, in their teachings of Gentile Christians at Antioch argued “unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” Paul planted the church at Antioch, which included the message of Jesus, not Moses. The voices of the oppressed speak to the interpretations of those messages, and how those interpretations impacted the lives of their ancestors and the present. The book, *A Dream Unfinished*, offers a collection of essays and articles from a cross-section of theologians, including Diana Hayes who focused on their experiences as non-whites residing in the United States. Hayes writes,

African Americans were and still are, for the most part, a holistic, communitarian, joy filled, spiritual, and life-sustaining people. Their understanding of God as a being transcendent and unapproachable yet also very much present and active in their lives through the intercession of the ancestors – those who had lived lives worthy of emulation – and lesser gods found resonance in the ideology of Christianity. Here too they came across a transcendent God, who created them, as he created all things, for good, and an immanent God in the being of Jesus the Christ, who was like them in their impoverished and perilous state. At one time, however, white Christianity attempted to enforce a critically different understanding.²¹

Various types of contrasting beliefs were the basis for conflicts within the early church. A conflict concerning the scriptural interpretation on circumcision was resolved after “Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders” (Acts 15:2). This action was the

²⁰ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1923), 136.

²¹ Diana L. Hayes, “To Be the Bridge: Voices from the Margin.” *A Dream Unfinished: Theological Reflections on America from the Margins*, ed. Eleazar S. & Fernando F. Segovia Fernandez (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 59.

foundation for Church Councils and their role in resolving similar conflicts. Archbishop Peter L'Huillier, in his book, *The Church of the Ancient Councils* provides commentary on decisions rendered after hearing arguments on controversial biblical writing and conflicts relative to the doctrine of the church. Through his commentaries, L'Huillier provides insights on the historical circumstances, basis for interpretations and possible misinterpretations. The creed of Arius, a priest of the church of Baucalis [Alexandria, Egypt], was perhaps one of the most significant doctrinal conflicts whereby Arius “denied the eternity and the real divine nature of the Word.”²²

Alistair McGrath, in his book *Christian Theology: An Introduction* explores this issue and various concepts of theology. He provides a thorough overview of major periods, events, doctrines, theological developments, and the contributions of persons to include Thomas Aquinas, Justin Martyr, John Calvin, and Martin Luther. From the birth of Christianity, the Old Testament was taught as the Word of God. McGrath says “word implies action and communication.”²³ The will of God is for us to live the life of Christ. It is applying the lifestyle that liberates the soul from bondage of sinfulness and eternal death. Applying that action as the will of God is espoused by Dr. Lucius Dalton in his book *Doing What God Requires*. Through sermon exegesis of the Word of God, he teaches how to live out the will of God. Through his sermons, he provides convincing evidence that carrying out the will of God avails significant benefits. Dr. Dalton writes,

²² Archbishop Peter L'Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils: The Disciplinary Work of the First Four Ecumenical Councils* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 17.

²³ Alistair E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 166.

“God’s Word is our road map. It is our problem fixer. It is our life sustainer. It is our guide.... It is the way to salvation.”²⁴

When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. expounded, “free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, I’m free at last!”, his words were not restricted to freeing people of African descent from the chains of injustice and legalized segregation. Dr. King was advocating compliance for all humankind to carry out the will of God—a mandate that included freedom for every race, ethnicity and culture. As John Wesley established his new denomination of Methodism the subject of human bondage of African Americans created divisive conflicts. The writings of Kenneth Collins and John Tyson in their book, *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition* reflect the actions of John Wesley and the intent of Methodism in carrying out the will of God. Their book includes a collection of essays, insights and commentaries on the experiences of Wesley. There are insightful teachings on the topics of repentance, new birth, conversion, justification, sanctification, salvation, and how the early Methodists responded to the issue of freedom for the enslavement of African Americans. The authors wrote, “Wesley viewed slavery as an abominable evil, and his strongly worded sentiments on the subject became an example for generations of his followers.”²⁵

David Whitford explores the evil of human bondage extensively in his book, *The Curse of Ham in the Early Modern Era*. The book reveals how writers, misrepresenting the story of the curse recorded in Genesis 9:21-27 used the story as a cornerstone for justification of the slave trade, and perpetuated the legend in efforts to invoke laws and

²⁴ Lucius M. Dalton, *Doing What God Requires* (Lithonia, Georgia: Orman Press, 2003), 69.

²⁵ Kenneth J. Collins and John H. Tyson, *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001.Collins), 79.

behavior restricting the freedom of African Americans. Whitford says “Ham became the primary mover behind all things opposed to God, the church, or proper behavior. As part of that etiological work, the episode between Ham and Noah was also used to explain differences in status between people.”²⁶

Theological

As Jesus ministered in the synagogue, he often turned to the ministry of Isaiah including his words “he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4:18). The message of the gospel clearly illustrates that slavery and oppression were in conflict with the life of Jesus and the will of God. Yet, as the church preached Christ during the eras of forced enslavement and legalized segregation, oppressors, professing the desire to do the will of God turned to Scripture in support of their beliefs. Miguel De La Torre explores this ideology in his book *Reading the Bible From the Margins*. De La Torre reminds his readers how the Bible is often read through the lens of white men, who are unable to relate to those being oppressed. He examines how the Bible should be used to liberate the oppressed, specifically those who suffer from some form of injustice in the United States. De La Torre argues, “when the dominant culture makes its reality normative for the rest of the world, the Bible becomes domesticated and hence ceases to be relevant.”²⁷

As Disciples of Christ and called to serve as peacemakers and reconcilers of conflict, United Methodists are guided by Scripture, Christian tradition, personal

²⁶ David M. Whitford, *The Curse of Ham in the Early Modern Era: The Bible and the Justifications for Slavery* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate 2009), 172.

²⁷ Miguel A. De La Torre, *Reading the Bible from the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 8.

experience, and reason which are components of a methodology referred to as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. This methodology serves to promote growth and a mature understanding of the Christian faith. In addition, peace is reaffirmed in *The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church* which emphasizes the study of the underlying causes of conflict among social groups and nations, the seeking of positive remedies, and become instruments of peace.²⁸ In the midst of conflict, the will of God calls for peace. Yet, peace for many is an elusive phenomenon. Peace requires setting aside personal needs and working together for a common purpose. Ken Sande explores this motif in his book *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*. Sande uses the Bible as the primary reference in the teaching of principles for resolving conflicts. Stressing the importance of reaching the heart, he provides suggestions designed to bring reconciliation to the most complex conflicts in daily life. Emphasizing the need for trust, Sande says “reconciliation requires that you give a repentant person an opportunity to demonstrate repentance and regain your trust.”²⁹

Trust, the foundation of any relationship, is often harmed or broken by conflicts. When that trust is damaged, healing is a prerequisite for reconciliation. The healing is best exemplified through actions of caring, which involves finding a loving way to express the existence of a conflict. This act of caring is perceived as confronting, which could result in defensiveness or further tension. David Augsburger, in his book *Caring Enough to Confront* recognizes how conflicts can serve as fuel for greater problems and hurt. He strongly admonishes that it is not the conflict, but the approach one uses in

²⁸ Harriet Jane Olson, “6091, A Call for Peacemaking”, in *The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church 2008* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2008), 850.

²⁹ Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, 6th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2004), 219.

responding to conflicts. He stresses the importance of understanding how to integrate our needs with the needs of others. Thus, he provides useful tools that are beneficial in responding to conflicts in healthy ways, and designed to build stronger relationships. Augsburger says “comment not to ventilate and get release from your pent-up feelings but to give something of worth to the other, something helpful to another.”³⁰

³⁰ David Augsburger, *Caring Enough to Confront: How to Understand and Express Your Deepest Feelings Towards Others* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1986), 56.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The *New Interpreter's Bible* asserts that the word conflict evolves from the Hebrew word “milkhamah,” and the Greek word “agon.”

In the Old Testament, milkhamah has a range of meanings: from shoving to crowding from conflict to antagonism, from battle to weapons of war and experts of war. The noun occurs 320 times. The verb, which occurs 168 times, means to do battle with, to fight. Noun and verb may appear jointly; when they do, their combined force points to Yahweh's participation as a warring God with and against Yahweh's people.... In the New Testament, due to Hellenistic influences, conflict [agon], involves a contest or fight amid great strain, an intensity of forces, or an athletic contest.... Figuratively, conflict is like running a race while bearing internal inconsistencies, personal suffering, or struggle over particular beliefs.¹

In his book *The Peacemaker*, Ken Sande defines conflict as a “difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone's goals or desire.”² Conflicts are a normal part of existence. The most well meaning churches have been unable to prevent this reality. Why is this so? In his book *Evil*, Hans Schwarz asks “is there a force within and yet transcending humanity that functions, as it were, as a diabolos or as a ‘disorder,’

¹ Katharine Doob Sakenfield, ed., *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 716-717.

² Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, 6th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2004), 29.

continually detracting from the experience of the good in our lives and turning it instead into something negative?”³

Those types of forces, known as Satan, were unsuccessful in defeating Jesus, who warned his followers of the endless determination of Satan, especially in the church. Dr. J. Vernon McGee, in his book *Ezra, Nehemiah, & Esther* writes, “In the history of the church we have seen that when the devil could not destroy the church by persecution, the next thing he did was to join it!”⁴

The ministry setting of this writer is Belfast United Methodist Church, a European congregation of less than one hundred members, located in a rural community twenty miles east of Cincinnati, Ohio. The history of the congregation, which began in the early 1800s, has been inclusive of many challenges and conflicts. The church gained official affiliation with the Methodist Church in 1870, which required adjustments to the rules and guidelines of Methodism. Based on its history of operating under familiar guidelines, the church continued to maintain itself as an independent family church.

Under the guidelines of Methodism as outlined in *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, the pastor serves as Chief Executive Officer of the church. However, the prior leadership of Belfast did not allow pastors to serve in roles of administration. Between the period 1900 thru 1983, pastors served for an average of two

³ Hans Schwarz, *Evil: A Historical and Theological Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 3.

⁴ J. Vernon McGee, *Ezra, Nehemiah, & Esther* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson 1997), 117.

and one-half years. Most of them served as circuit riders. They were only permitted to preach on Sunday. This policy restricted the overall leadership role of the pastor, which did not allow Belfast to benefit from the teaching, supervision and guidance of the appointed pastor. Overall, various members, who were often in conflict with each other, performed the administration of the church.

The teaching and guidance were especially needed in resolving conflicts, which often resulted in threats, mental and physical confrontations. Some of the most severe conflicts evolved from the lack of understanding relative to church stewardship, which in 1965 resulted in the departure of over half of the members shortly after the completion of a major renovation project. In July 2010, theological differences and inaccurate information relative to the official position of the United Methodist Church concerning its policy on the membership and acceptance of homosexuals led to the departure of approximately one third of the members. The remaining members, who will become authors of the history, placed the blame primarily on the departing members.

In Matthew 6:33 Jesus teaches, “strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Usually, the human side of man does not want to accept or admit wrongdoing. This motif impedes or makes reconciliation difficult and most likely impossible. Dave Peters, in his book, *Surviving Church Conflict* says, “Conflict resolution must allow people to focus on their lives and hurts on the Savior’s healing love. When members continue to blame each other for their

problems, they will become separated from others and embittered.”⁵ In Mark 9:50 Jesus says, “be at peace with one another.” Being at peace with one another does not require the mandate handed down by God that we love one another. Rather, the writer submits that peace coexistence would be dependent upon the willingness of each party to live with mutual and tolerance and acceptance.

The purpose of this project is two-fold: to work with the congregation in the current setting to help members identify the contributing causes of conflicts; and develop a design to address conflicts biblically, which will help prepare the congregation to manage future conflicts. The biblical sections will focus on a study of 1 Samuel 24:10-11 involving the conflict between King Saul and David; and Matthew 26:51-52 during the arrest of Jesus, which prompted Peter to cut off the ear of the slave of the high priest. The theological section will focus on Liberation Theology.

The subject of conflict means many things for all people. The topic often creates negative images. Kenneth Gangel and Samuel L. Canine in their book *Communication and Conflict Management* state that “when a person views conflicts from only a negative perspective, it is a short step to making it imperative to subdue conflicts at all costs.”⁶ They develop and grow out of controversies and disagreements on finances, personality clashes, jealousy, gossip, authority and power struggles, lack of communication,

⁵ David Peters, *Surviving Church Conflict* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1997), 61.

⁶ Kenneth O. Gangel and Samuel L. Canine, *Communication and Conflict Management in Churches and Christian Organization* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 130.

inadequate organizational structures, lack of clarity on expectations, and worship styles. Conflicts involve a tug of war between forces of sinfulness against righteousness. These forces have no preference to race, ethnicity, economic or social status.

The sinful nature of humanness creates tension and anxiety that seek results for self-interest. This desire may fuel actions of pressure, tension, challenges, anger, fights, battles and warfare. They are known to be the root of families turning against families, friends against friends, and communities against communities. Conflicts are to be expected and can grow in intensity. They can lead to destructiveness. The ferocity of conflicts can be traced back to the early existence of humankind when Cain killed Abel, his brother. This writer compares conflicts to a warning light installed in vehicles. The light may give a warning to check the engine, refuel the car, to fasten seat belts or change the oil. Bill Hybels, in the book *Making Life Work* writes, “if that warning light prompts us to get out the owner’s manual or pop the hood in order to find out what is wrong, that little red light has served us well.”⁷ Serious problems, which often grow from conflict, are preceded by warning lights. Failure to respond to conflict in constructive ways can lead to bad consequences. Nancy Ammerman, in her book *Studying Congregations* writes, “one hopeful place to begin is with the acceptance of conflict as a normal and potentially healthy experience.”⁸ Opening the manual of the biblical teachings will

⁷ Bill Hybels, *Making Life Work: Putting God's Wisdom into Wisdom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 180.

⁸ Nancy Ammerman, et al. *Studying Congregations* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 120.

provide opportunities to respond to conflicts early and constructively. Each response must be driven by acts of peace, healing and reconciliation.

Biblical Foundation

Old Testament

Conflicts are known to result in deadly consequences. Biblical writings serve as a guide to resolution through the motif of healing, peace and reconciliation. The conflict between Saul and David told in First Samuel provides historic vivid details how conflict may arise, turn to anger and violence, but can result in healing, peace, and reconciliation. Whereas the authorship of 1 Samuel is uncertain, many biblical scholars, including Walter Brueggemann, John Woodhouse, Ralph Klein and P. Kyle McCarter attribute the writing to at least three authors. They believe the writing is a collection of many stories written over many years.

Edward Fox and other biblical scholars believe 1 Samuel was recorded during the “stretch from settlement (the books of Joshua and Judges) through monarchy and eventual collapse several hundred years later (Kings), reflect a people’s struggle with what it means to ask for leadership, how the leaders measure up to the task, and how the ideals of a culture fare in the process.”⁹ Then too, Antony Campbell, in his book *1 Samuel* submits that the writing was during a time when “the Israel of the wilderness or Mosaic generation was portrayed as rebellious and unfaithful.”¹⁰

⁹ Everett Fox, *Give Us a King: Saul, Samuel, and David* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1999), xvi.

¹⁰ Antony Campbell, *1 Samuel: The Forms of the Old Testament Literature*, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans 2003), 34.

Walter Brueggemann, in his book *First and Second Samuel* writes, “as the Samuel narrative unfolds, we discover that Israel is waiting for a king who will protect, defend, gather, liberate, and legitimate the community.”¹¹ Israel was experiencing a transitional period from the governing body of judges to the leadership of kings. Saul, anointed by Yahweh as the new king, had a strong desire to be honored as a leader and deliverer. With the holy anointing of God, Saul was given power. Jane Olson, in *1 Samuel, The New Interpreter's Bible*, writes, “to hold power does not mean that we will surrender to our violent impulses.”¹² Samuel, disappointed with the disobedience of Saul rejected him as king. That rejection led to the anointing and rise of David. Saul, in his desire to maintain his power reacted with anger, hostility and violence. The climax of this conflict resulted in acts of peace, healing, and reconciliation by David:

This very day your eyes have seen how the Lord gave you into my hand in the cave; and some urged me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, 'I will not raise my hand against my lord; for he is the Lord's anointed.' See, my father, see the corner of your cloak in my hand; for by the fact that I cut off the corner of your cloak, and did not kill you, you may know for certain that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you are hunting me to take my life (1 Sam. 24:10-11).

The stage for this dramatic encounter was set because Saul “transgressed [violated] the commandment of the Lord” (1 Sam. 15:24). This was a grave and serious sin of disobedience by the king. Hence, God rejected Saul and “sought out a man after his own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14). Arthur Pink, in his book, *The Life of David* wrote, “therefore, does

¹¹ Walter Brueggeman, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 10.

¹² 1 Samuel, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 2, ed Harriet Jane Olson, et. al. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 1160.

faith perceive the hand of God in everything which enters our lives, be it great or small. And it is only as we recognize His hand molding all our circumstances that God is honored, and our hearts are kept in peace.”¹³

As the scene of controversy unfolds, Samuel advises the Lord of a potential candidate, and identifies him as “the youngest, who is keeping the sheep” (1 Sam. 16:11). Robert Alter, in the book *The David Story* says “by his sheer youth, he has been excluded from consideration, as a kind of male Cinderella left to his domestic chores instead of being invited to the party.”¹⁴ But God, using his authority as “Chief Executive Officer” says to Samuel, “rise and anoint him; for this is the one” (1 Sam. 16:12).

The man was David. And the Lord attempted to “remove any chance of reprisal from a suspicious Saul by making the actual anointing a secret part of a sacrificial ceremony.”¹⁵ Saul would retain his official position as king while God prepared David for the throne. The choosing of David was based on what God knew of his heart. David Hester, in his book *First and Second Samuel* wrote, “whatever God saw in David, he showed the promise of love for God and willingness to live by the Torah, the instruction of God.”¹⁶ On the other hand, Pink observes that the selection of David “was a notable step toward advancing the work of redemption. David was not only the ancestor of

¹³ Arthur W. Pink, *The Life of David* [book online] (Albany, GA: Ages Software, 2000; available from [http://www.thescripturealone.com/Pink_LifeOfDavid\(1\).PDF](http://www.thescripturealone.com/Pink_LifeOfDavid(1).PDF); Internet (July 11, 2011).

¹⁴ Robert Alter, *The David Story* (New York: NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999), 97.

¹⁵ Ralph David Gehrke, *Concordia Commentary: 1 and 2 Samuel* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), 137.

¹⁶ David C. Hester, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2000), 52.

Christ, but in some respects the most eminent personal type of Him in all the Old Testament.”¹⁷

The disobedient Saul, having lost favor with God complained, “an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him” (1 Sam. 16:14). Ralph Gebrke, in the book *Concordia Commentary* writes, “in seeking relief for their king, Saul’s concerned courtiers decide to obtain a skillful lyre player.”¹⁸ This player used a harp, a multi-string wooden instrument, known to bring soothing and relief from emotional stress. Robert Alter, in the book *The David Story* says, “Saul did not know what to do and was dependent on the counsel of his ‘lad’; here one of his lads offers the needed advice for dealing with his melancholia.”¹⁹ The lad recommended the services of a young shepherd boy named David. The lad highly recommended David as “the Bethlehemite who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the Lord is with him” (1 Sam. 16:18).

David, assuming the roles of “music man” and “healer” undertakes his assignment unknowing he was preparing to replace Saul, the son of Samuel. This must have been difficult for Samuel, whom God had appointed to serve as the recruitment officer in locating a king to succeed his son. As David assumed his place in the court of Saul, Alter says “Saul is the first of many people reported to love David—the very man who will

¹⁷ Pink, accessed July 11, 2011.

¹⁸ Gehrke, 139.

¹⁹ Robert Alter, *The David Story* (New York: NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999), 98.

become his bitter enemy.”²⁰ As a favorite in the court of Saul, David was also appointed to serve as an armor-bearer. Gebrke says David would serve as a “page in peacetime, and in wartime the one who supplied him with weapons required in the varying phases of combat.”²¹ The story provides vivid imagery of two men, one chosen by the Lord and one rejected by the Lord, unaware of the pending conflict and hostility that would soon separate them, but are joining together in meaningful service to the Lord. These events establish the platform for David to not only prove his worth as a skilled musician, but to rise to national prominence and respect as a mighty warrior.

The might of David surfaced when he delivered supplies to the battlefield in support of the Israelites who were in conflict with the Philistines. The giant Goliath led the Philistines, and when the Israelites saw him, “they all ran from him in great fear” (1 Sam. 17:24). Whereas the army of the king trembled with fear of Goliath, David “confronts the Philistine who is armed to the teeth.”²² As this conflict escalated between these two unlike foes, “David proves to be remarkably skillful with the sling, [and] the enormous giant falls at his feet.”²³

The results of the David and Goliath confrontation presented a shocking contrast to what may have appeared to be a certain tragedy for David, a known shepherd boy, musician and servant. In 1 Samuel 17:33 Saul commented, “you are only a boy.” His size

²⁰ Alter, 99.

²¹ Gehrke, 140.

²² Ibid., 148.

²³ Ibid., 149.

was an apparent contrast to Goliath, known as a fierce warrior with years of combat to his credit, and stood “over nine feet tall” (1 Sam. 17:4). Although traditional discussions give the impression that David was the victor using a sling and a stone (1 Sam. 17:40), the stone launched by David from the sling stunned him, and David then dispatched him with his sword.²⁴

The exact circumstances of the victory were not important. His accomplishment had surpassed the events of Saul and gained him national prominence. Women, with excitement and admiration, took note of his valor and compared David and Saul saying, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands” (1 Sam. 18:7). These and other expressions of appreciation for David inflamed Saul with envy and jealousy. In his attempt to defuse the popularity of his rival, Saul assigned David to other military tasks. As David was confronted with additional encounters “he emerges from each test stronger and more successful, whereas Saul becomes progressively more fearful and terrified.”²⁵ King Saul, perhaps feeling he had a monopoly on success, felt more threatened. David was a threat to his position and authority as king. Saul failed to realize that David had no desire for his position. David recognized Saul “held the office of king by Divine appointment—not merely as other kings may be regarded as holding it, but as God’s lieutenant.”²⁶

²⁴ Nolan B. Harmon, ed. *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 2 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1953), 979.

²⁵ Gehrke, 152.

²⁶ William G. Blaikie, *The First Book of Samuel* (Minneapolis, MN: Klock and Klock Christian Publishers, 1978), 369.

The Bible is a book about God, who is often referred to as the Holy One. In the Old Testament, holy is the Hebrew word “Qodesh”, meaning “consecrated things, dedicated, and sacredness.”²⁷ Holiness is summarized in *The Dictionary of the Old Testaments* which states, “in Scripture, holiness is exclusive to Yahweh; either from God’s presence or from consecration to the sanctuary.... Holiness is often defined as separation, because objects and persons consecrated for use at the sanctuary are removed or set apart from ordinary use.”²⁸

Without the knowledge of David, God had anointed him as the future leader and king. John Woodhouse, in his book *I Samuel: Looking for a Leader* explains, “if David was holding the symbol of the kingdom in his hands, he was also holding the symbol of his innocence, his faithfulness, and kindness toward Saul. David had demonstrated that he would leave it to the Lord to deal with the differences between himself and Saul.”²⁹ His display of Holiness represented the type of leader desired by God.

Although David clearly indicated his respect for Saul as a holy instrument of God, Campbell states “the presence of David was a constant challenge to Saul’s crown.”³⁰ Saul, having gained his throne not through violence, but by the gift of God, resorted to

²⁷ Michael S. Tan & Michael D. Bushell, "Bible Works for Windows." (Norfolk, VA: BibleWorks, LLC, 2001).

²⁸ Alexander T. Desmond and David W. Baker, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press), 2003.

²⁹ John Woodhouse, *I Samuel: Looking for a Leader* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 467.

³⁰ Campbell, 135.

increasing violence as he felt power shifting from himself toward David.³¹ His anger and jealousy escalated to furor and rage. Earlier, Saul felt under attack from unpleasant spirits of God. As he sought to gain relief from those spirits, he sought the healing music of David and his harp. Now, he is under the attack from the perceived threat of David, and his remedy is to remove David. The king, “hotheaded, and prone to violence..., twice tried to murder his faithful servant David and pursued him relentlessly.”³²

David was facing a major conflict, which may cause many to respond with confusion, fear, and defensive actions that create additional conflict. A conflict of intense threat or fear, and not solved readily, can cause the person to feel helpless and anxious. Subsequent adjustments may then be directed more to the relief of anxiety than to the solution of real problems.³³ Seeking relief from anxiety, David turned to Jonathan, son of Saul who gave the advice, “go in peace” (1 Sam. 20:42). With the desire for peace, David fled and became a wanderer. His journey and places of refuge included Nob, 1 Samuel 21:1-9; Gath, 1 Samuel 21:10-15; and Adullam and Mizah, 1 Samuel 22:1-5. David well knew that Saul continued his pursuit to kill him. He faced the challenge of opposing evil without creating evil. Schwarz says “Evil or wickedness, called "ra" or "raah" in Hebrew, is rendered in Greek as “kakos” or “poneros” and stands in opposition to the good or the

³¹ Olson, 1156

³² Israel Finkelstein & Neil A. Silberman, *David and Solomon: In Search of the Bible's Sacred Kings and the Roots of the Western Tradition* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2006), 85.

³³ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15 ed., vol. 3, s.v. “Conflict.”

divine.”³⁴ As David continued his flight from Saul, Pink notes that “he was a skilled leader, had six hundred men under him, and he might easily have employed strategy, lured his enemy into a trap, fallen upon and slain him. Instead, he possessed his soul in patience, walked in God’s ways, and waited God’s time.”³⁵

As Saul and his forces continued their pursuit of David, the conflict would reach a dramatic end at the “Rocks of the Wild Goats” (1 Sam. 24:2). The writers of *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* say “David sought refuge from Saul in the rugged terrain around Engedi, and in a cave in the vicinity the incident occurred in which David cut off Saul’s skirt but did not take his life.”³⁶ The area is further described as “an important oasis at about the middle of the west side of the Dead Sea, thirty-five miles southeast of Jerusalem.”³⁷ Saul, with army of thousands, were poised to overtake David when, “inadvertently he goes into a cave where the outlaw and his men are hiding.”³⁸ Unaware of the presence of David, Saul sought a private area to “relieve himself” (1 Sam. 24:3). The defenseless position of Saul presented David the opportunity to end the constant threat of his oppressor. David had repeatedly evaded the evil of Saul, and could have felt justified to remove Saul as an enemy. Instead of turning to violence, William Blaikie, in *The First Book of Samuel* wrote, “David appealed to the great Judge of all, and

³⁴ Schwarz, 42.

³⁵ Pink, accessed July 12, 2011.

³⁶ Emory Stevens Bucke, ed., *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1962), 102.

³⁷ Ibid., 101-102.

³⁸ Harmon, vol. 2, 1008.

placed the quarrel in His hands.”³⁹ As David considered the possible options for peace, healing and reconciliation, he “cut off a corner of Saul’s cloak” (1 Sam. 24:4). Instead of evil, David fought evil and responded with holiness and forgiveness by cutting off Saul’s robe. Olson proposes “to forgive and to act with compassion does not mean to ignore the realities of violence and evil that confront us.”⁴⁰ David “acted in utter contempt of what was personal and selfish, and in deepest reverence for what was holy and divine.”⁴¹

As David continued his quest of reconciliation in 1 Samuel 24:8-9, “he called after Saul, ‘My lord the king!’... ‘David bowed with his face to the ground.’” First, David had refrained from reproaching or sharply expostulating Saul, now he shows that there was no ill-will in his own heart against him. He appealed to the most decisive proof that he had no intention of injuring him.⁴² That proof is noted in 1 Samuel 24:11 whereas David reminds Saul “I cut off the corner of your cloak.” Blaikie observes:

David had given him that day a convincing proof of his integrity; though it seemed that the Lord had delivered him into his hand, he killed him not. He had reversed the principle on which men were accustomed to act when they came upon an enemy and him in his power.⁴³

Saul, overcome with remorse and gratitude, “lifted up his voice and wept” (1 Sam. 24:16). Pink notes “how surprised the blood-thirsty monarch must have been in

³⁹ William G. Blaikie, *The First Book of Samuel* (Minneapolis, MN: Klock and Klock Christian Publishers, 1978), 370.

⁴⁰ Olson, 1160.

⁴¹ Blaikie, 368.

⁴² Pink, accessed July 12, 2011.

⁴³ Blaikie, 370.

hearing himself addressed by the one whose life he sought! The posture of David was not that of a cringing criminal, but of a loyal subject.”⁴⁴ David, through acts of peace and healing was able to bring reconciliation to the relationship with Saul. His success was possible based on his respect for the holiness of God. Robert Polzin, in his book, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist* believes the decision of David was “divinely inspired.”⁴⁵ As David faced the evil of Saul, he was guided by his view of a holy God. In 1 Samuel 24:7 David refers to Saul as “my Lord”, reflecting respect and a promise not to harm the anointed of Yahweh. The good will gesture by David not to harm the appointed king was an oath to the Holy God. Ralph Klein, in the *Word Biblical Commentary, 1 Samuel* writes, “David swore an oath, whose breach would have capital consequences.”⁴⁶ Eugene Peterson, in his book *Leap Over a Wall* writes, “while he was living in that austere country, his awareness of holiness, of Gods beauty and presence in everything, in everyone, increased exponentially. David was above all reverent.”⁴⁷

David held a special place in the eyes of God; yet, David would later commit acts whereby his desire for peace, healing and reconciliation is missing in action. David would later respond with some of the same negative traits he despised in Saul. Why?

⁴⁴ Pink, accessed July 12, 2011.

⁴⁵ Robert Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 210.

⁴⁶ Ralph W. Klein, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Samuel*, vol. 10, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 239.

⁴⁷ Eugene H. Peterson, *Leap over a Wall: Earthly Spirituality for Everyday Christians* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1997), 77.

The flaws of David is evidence that he too “was a man of like passions with us, and unless divine grace wrought effectually within him, no outward providences would avail to spiritualize him. The moment the Lord leaves us to ourselves, a fall is certain.”⁴⁸ Later, the actions of David reflected his submission to the power of the flesh. For instance, in 2 Samuel 11:4, David committed adultery with the wife [Bathsheba] of a soldier in battle, Uriah, the Hittite. In an effort to conceal his evil behavior, David, in 2 Samuel 11:14-17 was successful in arranging the death of the husband of Bathsheba. David, however, in his conflict with Saul gave examples for others to follow in seeking peace, healing and reconciliation. And later, the power of Satan convinces the vulnerable David to take a census, which angered God who “sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it” (1 Chron. 21:15).

The original sin of Adam and Eve is a constant reminder of behavior or decisions that may erupt into harmful consequences. Walter Wink, in his book *Engaging the Powers* writes, “Neither evil nor violence is a part of the creation, but both enter as a result of the first couple’s sin and the machinations of the serpent.”⁴⁹ The premise of original sin may lead to the perception of never escaping the grip of evil. What can one do? Hans Schwarz, in his book *Evil: A Historical and Theological Perspective* writes,

Humans subject their ‘weak wills’ willingly and with longing to these powers. Human beings need not remain under the influence of these partly illusory, partly real and destructive powers of evil. The Christian faith testifies to

⁴⁸ Pink, accessed July 12, 2011.

⁴⁹ Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 14.

the fact that it liberates human beings to their true selves and gives them genuine freedom and wholeness.⁵⁰

Conflicts in church, like society, have no boundaries. They develop and grow out of controversies and disagreements over finances, personality clashes, jealousy, gossip, authority and power struggles, lack of communication, inadequate organizational structures, lack of clarity on expectations, and worship styles. Conflicts involve a tug of war between forces of sinfulness against righteousness. Today, as the church struggles with conflicts of disagreements and quarrels, there is a need to model that example. How should the church above all be reverent? Alexander and Baker offer these guidelines:

Display a holy character by showing love to others. The surrounding laws and exhortations provided specific guidelines for fulfilling the command to love one's neighbor. The context identifies a neighbor as one's fellow, a hired laborer, one who is physically challenged, person of higher or lower social standing, even one who has caused offense.⁵¹

In his book *The Atonement*, Leon Morris says “quarrels and enmities are unfortunately part and parcel of life here and now.... But it is also part and parcel of life here and now that quarrels are not necessarily permanent.”⁵² The conflict of Saul and David serves as a warning that unresolved conflicts may result in a cycle of conflicts. It also should provide the remedy to break that cycle. Olson says “the cycle is broken not by acceptance of the evil done, but by forgiveness that frees the victim from the need for

⁵⁰ Schwarz, 208.

⁵¹ Alexander and Baker, 425.

⁵² Leon Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 138.

vengeance and enables a new future.”⁵³ Through efforts of peace, healing and reconciliation, forgiveness and compassion are able to break the cycle of conflict and keep us in touch with the divine.

Biblical Foundation

New Testament

The writing of Matthew occurred during uncertain times in the lives of the early followers of Christ. Many biblical scholars, including Daniel Harrington, J. Andrew Overman, and Ben Witherington agree that someone other than Matthew completed the writing. They further assert that the writing was completed around the period of 100 CE. Years earlier, the Romans had destroyed the holy city of Jerusalem and its temple. These factors led to the additional fleeing of Jews and believers from Israel into foreign lands of the Roman Empire.

J. Andrew Overman, in his book *Church and Community in Crisis* writes, “Foreigners held ultimate control over the cities in the region in which Matthew lived. And this foreign power selectively worked with local elite and others whom they deemed necessary to maintain control.”⁵⁴ The foreign power was the Roman government and the local elite included the Pharisees, who maintained control in Israel for the emperor.

The threats, conflicts and persecution following the destruction of Jerusalem resulted in many of the early followers fleeing to other communities. Several locations

⁵³ Olson, 1160.

⁵⁴ J. Andrew Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel According to Matthew* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 7.

for the Matthean community have been argued. The majority of scholars favor Antioch for reasons to include “internal evidence of the Gospel points to some Greek-speaking urban area where Jews and Christians were in intense interaction. Greek was the dominant language in Antioch.”⁵⁵ Antioch had become a refuge for Jews fleeing from various persecutions, including those who fled “because of the persecution that took place over Stephen” (Acts 11:19).

William Thompson, in his book *Matthew's Story* writes, “fugitives from persecution in Jerusalem founded the Christian community in Antioch, a city north of Jerusalem on the Mediterranean Sea in the Roman province of Syria.”⁵⁶ It was in “Antioch that the disciples were first called ‘Christians’” (Acts 11:26). Antioch was the capital of the Roman province of Syria.... It was situated on the east bank of the Orontes River, about 16.5 miles from the Mediterranean Sea and 300 miles north of Jerusalem.⁵⁷ The fugitives of Antioch included Jews and Gentiles. The two groups contributed to the growth of the church. Daniel Harrington, in his book *The Gospel of Matthew* says “the primary mission field for the community of the Matthean Jesus was Israel.... Though largely Jewish, the Matthean community seems to have been open to non-Jews and

⁵⁵ Robert K. Feaster, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 7 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 105.

⁵⁶ William G. Thompson, *Matthew's Story: Good News for Uncertain Times* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989), 8.

⁵⁷ Ronald Youngblood, ed., *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 80.

probably took the ‘great commission’ of Matthew 28:19 as a stimulus to even greater effort in carrying out the Gentile mission.”⁵⁸

The Matthew writer, in assuming his task and aware of the life Jews under Roman control, would have been concerned with the fugitive status of the Christians and the merging of Jews and Gentiles. These and other issues presented major conflicts in spreading the gospel by the disciples. Jeannine Brown, in her book, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective* says “in their mission to Israel, however, the disciples are frequently susceptible to ‘little faith.’”⁵⁹ The little faith of Peter led to his conflict with a slave as officials arrived to arrest Jesus.

Jesus said to him, ‘Friend, do what you are here to do.’ Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword back into its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?’ (Mat. 26:50-53).

Peter had a reputation for being impulsive, outspoken, and hotheaded, which prompted Jesus on one occasion to say to Peter “get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me” (Mat. 16:23). Michael Grant, in his book *Saint Peter* wrote, “we have seen that Peter was the leading apostle. Yet here he is showing a wretched lack of comprehension.”⁶⁰ On the other hand, Peter was one of the three most trusted by Jesus,

⁵⁸ Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 9.

⁵⁹ Jeannine K. Brown, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective: The Portrayal and Function of the Matthean Disciples* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 19.

⁶⁰ Michael Grant, *Saint Peter* (London, UK: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994), 67.

which reflects that Jesus, overall, trusted in the judgment of Peter. Grant says “despite his human deficiencies and setbacks..., Peter was, in last resort, as loyal and faithful to Jesus as human nature permitted him to be.”⁶¹ Thus, regardless of his quick and challenging responses, Peter may have felt justified for his actions, especially during the arrest of Jesus. Responses to conflicts, especially of the magnitude of violence, are often the climax to earlier events. In this case, there were many events that laid the foundation for the violent behavior of Peter.

For Peter, during the days leading up to this climatic moment, his emotions had been on a roller coaster ride. He heard Jesus make a number of disturbing comments, including Matthew 26:2, “the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified”; Matthew 26:21, “truly I tell you, one of you will betray me”; and Matthew 26:31, “you will all become deserters because of me this night.” And in Matthew 26:34 Jesus addresses Peter on a personal level saying “truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.”

When Jesus shared the Passover dinner with his disciples, Peter witnessed the departure of Judas for reasons unknown to Peter. As Peter joined Jesus and the other disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, he may have expected an evening of rest and spiritual nurturing. He and the others were tired. After years of evading his eventual captors, Jesus knew it was time for him to surrender. As Jesus prayed in solitude, he returned to find Peter and others sleeping. Frustrated, Jesus chastised them, “So, could you not stay awake with me one hour?” (Mat. 26:40). Jesus had continued his moments

⁶¹ Grant, 71.

of prayer, only to find his disciples sleeping twice more. As Jesus expressed his disappointment for a third time, an army of “foot soldiers” converged on him and his disciples. James Boice, in his book *The Gospel of Matthew* refers to Peter finding “the arresting party moving toward Jesus.”⁶²

In the gospel of Matthew 26:47, “Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs.” Judas was leading the arresting party. Leroy Lawson, in his book *Matthew* describes the crowd as “Temple police.., accompanied by Roman soldiers.... They were a threatening number at any rate, armed for combat.”⁶³ Peter had to feel the sting of the threat when being approached by the mob with weapons. Warren Carter, in the book *Matthew and the Margins* wrote, “the chief priests had used mobs to fight the mobs of the priests and leaders of the people. The weapons were verbal abuse and stones. High priests also used slaves and mobs to forcibly remove tithes for themselves from threshing floors.”⁶⁴ As this scene rapidly unfolded, the eyes of Peter are open, but perhaps he was trying to gain total alertness from his sleep. As he struggles to stay alert, “his camp is overtaken by a threatening mob armed with swords. The sword is a symbol not only of mob violence or self-defense, but also of government itself.”⁶⁵

Peter may have felt the additional sting of pain upon seeing Judas Iscariot leading the mob. Judas, a colleague, and a member of the “twelve”, had sat at the Passover meal a

⁶² James M. Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 276.

⁶³ LeRoy Lawson, *Matthew* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard, 1984), 320.

⁶⁴ Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious* (Reading. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 512.

⁶⁵ Alexander, 477.

few hours earlier. The shock to Peter may have continued as Judas “came up to Jesus and said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ and kissed him” (Mat. 26:49). The kiss was the customary greeting given by a pupil to a rabbi.⁶⁶ Donald Senior, in the book *Matthew* says “a kiss between disciple and master was a sign of respect and friendship.”⁶⁷ The actions of Judas were not of friendship and respect. His behavior was a reflection of Benedict Arnold—utter betrayal. Ulrich Luz, in the book *Matthew 21-28* says “the kiss of Judas has become the symbol of a sordid and hypocritical betrayal that time and again in every century has engaged people.”⁶⁸

The kiss, the massive mob, swords and the history of the mob using weapons of mass destruction may have been a part of his mental imagery. Peter faced a major conflict. What was he thinking? What action should he take? Peter responds with an aggressive act of violence. Perhaps Peter reflected on the words Jesus made earlier in his ministry, “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Mat. 10:34). Matthew 26:51 reveals that Peter grabbed his sword, “drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear.” The sword became his first line of defense. Peter did not cut off a hand or an arm. He cut off an ear, indicating he was skilled in the handling of this deadly weapon. After all, Jesus had issued instructions for them to arm themselves with swords. Raymond Brown, in his book *The Death of the Messiah* wrote, “such solitary bravado is

⁶⁶ Nolan B. Harmon, ed. *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 7 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1951), 582.

⁶⁷ Donald Senior, *Matthew* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 306.

⁶⁸ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 412.

coherent with Peter's speaking and acting on many other occasions as attested in all the Gospels."⁶⁹ Boice says "he was courageous, and drawing his sword he struck out boldly."⁷⁰

More so, Peter had other reasons to carry and use the sword. Peter was known as a Zealot. Zealots "thought it was treason against God to pay tribute to the Roman emperor.... They were willing to fight to the death for Jewish independence."⁷¹ Peter, as a member of a military command would have been quite familiar with the sword. As a warrior, he would have been trained and prepared for warfare. However, his boldness evaporated in a moment when Jesus rebuked his action."⁷² The war response of Peter called for Jesus to command, "put your sword back" (Mat. 26:52). The response by Jesus appears to reinforce his teachings that "violence is self-destructive and futile, resulting only in a vicious spiral of violence."⁷³ However, his command also appears to contradict the earlier comment made of not coming "to bring peace, but a sword." Now he says "put your sword back." This may invoke the question as to why Jesus was calling for an act of non-violence.

⁶⁹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1994), 18.

⁷⁰ Boice, 276.

⁷¹ Youngblood, 1330.

⁷² Boice, 276.

⁷³ Neil M. Alexander, ed., *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 8 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 477.

Thomas Long, in his book, *Matthew* suggests three reasons for his non-violence: “first, violence is stupid, for it just escalates into even greater destruction. Second, violence is not the way of God in the world. Third, the scriptures call for the shepherd to be struck and the sheep to be scattered” (Zech. 13:7).⁷⁴ Then too, one could assume the position of non-violence was based on Matthew 26:47 wherein Judas arrives, and “with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs.” Ivor Powell, in his book *Simon Peter* says the relentless mob, “led by Judas and the detestable Pharisees, six hundred soldiers were to arrest the troublesome Nazarene and bring him to justice.”⁷⁵ Reference to six hundred pertains to a detachment, a term from the Greek word “speira,” which refers to a group of 600 men.⁷⁶

One may assume that this massive army was an overwhelming force for Jesus and his disciple. However, in Matthew 26:53 Jesus says “do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve ‘legions’ of angels?” A legion, during the “time of Augustus seems to have consisted of 6826 men.”⁷⁷ According to Boice, “a Roman legion was six thousand men.”⁷⁸ As Jesus surveys the perceived mismatch of the forces of the army, he makes it known that the arresting party of 600 does not compare to the 72,000 angels on standby to render him all the support he

⁷⁴ Thomas G. Long, *Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 305-306.

⁷⁵ Ivor Powell, *Simon Peter: Fisherman from Galilee* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1996), 112.

⁷⁶ Tan and Bushell,

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Boice, 576.

needed. On the other hand, Jesus did not want support from the angels. He did not need a sword from Peter. Whereas the officials came with human might, Jesus could overwhelm them through his resources of the divine. Clearly, “Jesus did not need to be defended. He was arrested because he was willing to be arrested.”⁷⁹ Warren Carter, in his book *Matthew* argues that the action of Peter indicates “he has not understood either Jesus’ instruction about nonviolent resistance or about his death as the will of God.”⁸⁰

The handling of this conflict by Jesus is consistent with his teachings on non-violence: “but I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also” (Mat. 5:39). Throughout his ministry, Jesus modeled the behavior for handling conflicts. His actions and teachings on anger, forgiveness, mercy and reconciliation were based on the will of God. His teachings are echoed in *The New Interpreter’s Bible* stating, “the way of non-violence, non-retaliation, love of enemies, is to be pursued to the end.”⁸¹

History affirms that regardless of the circumstances, human beings are prone to conflicts. As Paul wrestled with the conflict of man against man he professed “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Rom. 7:15). Paul, admitting to his internal conflicts recognized “the disunity that exists

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Warren Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 253.

⁸¹ Neil M. Alexander, ed., *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 8 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 477.

within man himself.”⁸² He acknowledges the internal presence of two persons, two distinct personalities. Those personalities contributed to distractions, confusion, which left him under constant attack by forces in rebellion to God.

All of these negative traits continued in the early church, which often suffered from the sinfulness of the “the fall.” The church was in need of restoring. That restoring was possible through the redeeming grace of Jesus. Arland J. Hultgren, in his book *Christ and His Benefits* says “it is through Christ that the Scriptures of Israel have been fulfilled, and it is through Christ that the God of Israel has drawn near to humankind to forgive the penitent and to give them his pledge of final salvation.”⁸³ Yet, conflict, deeply influenced by worldly values found a way to continue its presence in the church. The worldly view is often a champion for the use of force. Boice says “Christianity became worldly when it was made the official religion of the Roman Empire under Constantine. Whenever Christians have used force to advance the gospel, the church has always suffered for it.”⁸⁴

Conflicts, including the conflict of Peter, are usually indicators of deeper problems reflecting “the disunity that prevails between man and man. Half the human race is at war with the other half.”⁸⁵ His surrender was part of the final act of his mission of addressing those problems. They are based on the fall of humanity from God’s perfect

⁸² Burghardt, 2.

⁸³ Arland Hultgren, *Christ and His Benefits: Christology and Redemption in the New Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 85.

⁸⁴ James M. Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 577.

⁸⁵ Walter J. Burghardt, *Towards Reconciliation* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1974), 2.

creation, which created the need for redemption also allows restoration. In Psalm 51:12 David prays, “restore me the joy of your salvation.” In *Bible Works for Windows*, restoration in this context refers to the Hebrew word, “shuwb” meaning to return, come or go back.”⁸⁶ Restoration requires knowing what the “original” looked like. After his rebuke of Peter, Jesus administered his first act of restoration to the slave when “he touched his ear and healed him” (Luke 22:51). Jesus, in refusing to use power against his enemies, chose to use his power to bring healing and reconciliation. R.W. Yarbrough, in the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* says “his listeners should be reconciled to God in the light of the signs of the times.”⁸⁷

In spite of Peter’s issues, Jesus, who recognized the problems and saw his commitment to serve the Lord often restored him. Gangel and Canine note that with Peter, “the issue appeared to be one of commitment and restoration so that Peter could be the tool God had planned for him to be.”⁸⁸ Restoration was not limited to Israel, Peter, the disciples or the Roman government. J. Gresham Machen in his book *Christianity Liberalism* wrote, “Jesus rose from the dead into a new life of glory and power, and into that life He brings those for whom He died. The Christian, on the basis of Christ’s redeeming work, not only has died unto sin, but also lives unto God.”⁸⁹

⁸⁶Tan and Bushell.

⁸⁷ R.W. Yarbrough, “Reconciliation With God and With Others”, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, ed, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 503.

⁸⁸ Gangel and Canine, 173.

⁸⁹ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1923), 136.

Historical Foundations

The conflicts of Peter and others throughout the course of time are reflections of the problems and tensions experienced by all humankind. All have gone astray and are in need of restoration. J. Gresham Machen, in his book *Christianity and Liberation* wrote,

Human existence implies ‘freedom from instinctual determination of... actions,’ which is prerequisite for the development of human culture. The troubling fact, however, is that the two sides of this development, growing power and increasing individuation are not balanced. Consequently, the history of humanity is littered with conflict and strife, and ‘each step in the direction of growing individuation [has] threatened people with new insecurities.’⁹⁰

As Jesus completed his ministry he gave warnings, “whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). Whereas the warnings may seem harsh, Jesus was affirming the reality of conflicts and the need to expect them, especially within each family. Those same conflicts should be expected in the church. Harold Fray, in his book *Conflict and Change in the Church* says “little attention is given to these words in most churches, for they run against the grain.”⁹¹

Conflict and crisis are not a new phenomenon. History affirms that conflicts were a part of the church from its inception. Diana Hayes, in the book *A Dream Unfinished* wrote, “Christianity emerged in a time and place where cultures constantly merged and clashed, the crossroads of the Roman Empire found in the Middle East and rubbing elbows; exchanging ideas; learning from, teaching, and influencing each other socially,

⁹⁰ Schwarz, 30.

⁹¹ Harold R. Fray, *Conflict and Change in the Church* (Boston, MA: Pilgrim Press, 1969), 33.

politically, economically, and religiously.”⁹² In Acts 2, in the midst of different cultures, ethnic groups, socioeconomic conditions and languages, the Holy Spirit gave birth to the church. The early pioneers were mandated to “go and make disciples.” The many differences of these early believers set the stage for conflict. As they carried out their mission, conflict threatened the existence of Christianity. Thompson explains:

Growing pressure caused internal scandal and dissension. Christians betrayed one another, and hatred among Christians increased. False prophets and false messiahs claimed to be anointed by God to lead the community. Confusion, disorientation, and conflict divided those who followed Jesus as their risen Lord. As wickedness spread, their love for each other grew cold.⁹³

The Matthean community faced a major crisis in the life of the church. John Maxwell, in his book *Developing the Leader Within You* says the “test of a leader is the ability to recognize a problem before it becomes an emergency.”⁹⁴ The well being of the early church was in the hands of the Matthew writer and others devoted to the mission of protecting and promoting its health. They were to preach, evangelize, and provide convincing evidence that Jesus was the Messiah. Hultgren describes the audience as a “community, which was already heir to previous evangelization and Christian tradition.”⁹⁵

⁹² Diana L. Hayes, “Voices From the Margin,” in *A Dream Unfinished: Theological Reflections on America from the Margins*, ed. Eleazar S. Fernandez and Fernando F. Segovia (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 56.

⁹³ Thompson, 13.

⁹⁴ John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), 81.

⁹⁵ Hultgren, 76.

When Christ challenged his disciples with the question, “But who do you say that I am?”, Peter replied “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mat. 16:15-16). Peter’s reply gave birth to the creedal tradition of the Christian faith. His switch in faith and creedal tradition was not a simple transition. Peter, like Paul and other early followers of Jesus was a Jew—a follower of Judaism. The apostle Paul professed, “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law” (Acts 22:3). W.D. Niven, in his book *The Conflicts of the Early Church* wrote, “the primitive Christians never dreamt that Christianity involved any kind of breach with the faith of the fathers.”⁹⁶ As followers of Christ, and in their quest to spread the Good News, they came face to face with conflicts involving those in opposition to Christianity. Niven states, “to the Jews he [Paul] was clearly a renegade and a traitor.”⁹⁷ The transition from Judaism to Christianity resulted in additional conflict and persecution by other Jews. Niven says Jews were “disposed to take action against preachers of the Gospel because of fear that their preaching would cause popular disturbance.”⁹⁸

The persecuted Christians were leaving a faith tradition bound by its faith and connection to Abraham and the Law. They were in search of their own identity and discipleship. In their quest for their own individuality, the creeds served as foundational

⁹⁶ W.D. Niven, *The Conflicts of the Early Church* (New York, NY: Richard R. Smith, INC, 1931), 48.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 41.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 44.

statements for Christian discipleship. Ronald Youngblood, in *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* defines creed as a “brief, authoritative, formal statement of religious beliefs.”⁹⁹ Alister McGrath, in his book *Christian Theology* says “it has come to refer to a statement of faith, summarizing the main points of Christian belief, which is common to all Christians.”¹⁰⁰ Although the apostle Peter gave a foundational statement of the faith, followers throughout history developed and presented their own creeds. The creed of Arius, a priest of the church of Baucalis [Alexandria, Egypt], was perhaps one of the most significant. Archbishop Peter L’Huillier, in his book *The Church of the Ancient Councils* writes:

Arius came into open conflict with his bishop, Alexander of Alexandria. Arius denied the eternity and the real divine nature of the Word. He was condemned by a council of one hundred bishops from Egypt and Libya under the presidency of Alexander. However, Arius refused to submit to the decision and looked for support primarily among his former fellow disciples in the school of Antioch.¹⁰¹

The varied beliefs of the early church resulted in a variety of creeds and interpretations of doctrine of the trinity, salvation and the deity of Christ. The growing number of creeds and the diversity of perceptions were threatening the stability of the church. Diarmaid MacCulloch, in his book *Christianity* wrote, “there must be a universally recognized single authority in the Church able to make decisions: to choose

⁹⁹ Youngblood, 310.

¹⁰⁰ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 19.

¹⁰¹ Archbishop Peter Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils: The Disciplinary Work of the First Four Ecumenical Councils* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 17-18.

sacred texts for canonical status or compare the content of local creeds in Churches for a uniform direction in teaching.”¹⁰² According to Youngblood, the three most historically important creeds of the church are:

The Nicene Creed, adopted by the First Council of Nicea [325 C.E.].., formally proclaimed the deity of Christ and His equality among the persons of the trinity. The Athanasian Creed, [which] originated in Europe in the fourth century and relating especially to the doctrines of the Trinity and the bodily Incarnation of Christ. The Apostles Creed, which lies at the basis of most other religious statements of belief.¹⁰³

The goal for a universally recognized single authority in the church did not bring additional creeds and conflicts to an end. Arius, with his denial of the eternity ignited the flames for other controversies, including the Council of Constantinople. MacCulloch explains:

[Emperor Theodosius I] had no sympathy of the Arians, reflecting the general Latin and Western impatience with Greek scruples about language; he convened a council at Constantinople in 381.... The Council of Constantinople not only outlawed Arianism from the imperial Church, but also blocked two other directions in which the doctrine of the Trinity might have been led. The first came to be known after an Eastern Church leader called Macedonius, described by their nickname of Pneumatomachi [fighters against the Spirit], because their development of subordination ideas took them in a different direction from Arius.¹⁰⁴

John Wesley and Methodism

In the early 1700s, the founding of Methodism by John and Charles Wesley created doctrinal concerns for the Church of England. John and Charles, students at

¹⁰² Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York, NY: Viking, 2009), 130.

¹⁰³ Youngblood, 310-311.

¹⁰⁴ MacCulloch, 219.

University of Oxford, were the sons of Samuel Wesley, a priest in the Church of England. Upon entering Oxford, the Wesley brothers began a spiritual journey quite different than their teachings in the Church of England. They accepted the leadership role for the newfound group called the “Holy Club.” Henry Abelove, in his book *The Evangelist of Desire* says “they fasted, took communion frequently, observed the Sabbath, met together for prayer and study, and visited the prisoners in the local jail, whom they fed and taught and comforted.”¹⁰⁵

Kenneth Kinghorn, in his book *The Heritage of American Methodism* notes the “students mocked the enthusiasm and self-denial of these fervent young men.... The methodical disciplines of the members of the Holy Club caused critics to brand them ‘Methodists.’”¹⁰⁶ After graduation, as an ordained priest in the Church of England, many issues of his faith troubled the soul of John. Once, during a storm on the high seas, he later commented “[I was] very uncertain whether I should wake alive, and much ashamed of my unwillingness to die.”¹⁰⁷

In 1735, John and Charles were invited to share their ministry to the British controlled colony in Savannah, Georgia. Kinghorn writes,

Disappointingly, the British colonists did not respond with favor to their ministries.’ These failures intensified the spiritual despair of the Wesley brothers.

¹⁰⁵ Henry Abelove, *The Evangelist of Desire: John Wesley and the Methodist* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 2.

¹⁰⁶ Kenneth Kinghorn, *The Heritage of American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 12.

¹⁰⁷ Kenneth J. Collins and John H. Tyson, *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 58.

The members of the Georgia Colony turned against John and forced him to return to England in late December 1737. On the return voyage to England, John Wesley contemplated his ineffective ministry and his lack of certainty of God's love. He wrote, 'In vain have I fled from myself to America: I still groan under the intolerable weight of inherent misery.'¹⁰⁸

As Wesley returned to England, he continued to suffer from internal conflicts, which may be characterized as self-imposed bondage—the bondage of fear. In 1738, “Wesley boldly proclaimed to all who would hear the liberties of the gospel, of which one was surely freedom from both guilt and sinful fear.”¹⁰⁹ Wesley was seeking liberation from his own fears. Kinghorn wrote,

Their [John and Charles] spiritual transformations had brought them from law to grace and changed them from legalists to evangelists. Their experience of God's love gave them spiritual peace, and impulse for evangelism, and a sustaining motivation for addressing the evils of society. Having experienced spiritual liberty for themselves, these Oxford Methodists spent the rest of their lives spreading the good news of God's love....¹¹⁰

However, their teachings and Methodist ideals were in conflict with the established order. Due to these and other concerns, John and Charles were no longer welcome in the Church of England. Nevertheless, their determination to spread the gospel opened new doors to serve as traveling evangelists. This new ministry was sometimes met with resistance. Conflicts were a constant companion of John as he sought to serve as a messenger. On one occasion, as a crowd followed him with threats and intimidating remarks, Ablove summarizes how John decided to:

¹⁰⁸ Kinghorn, 12.

¹⁰⁹ Collins and Tyson, 60.

¹¹⁰ Kinghorn, 13.

Turn on them ‘abruptly,’ face them, and try to talk them into recognizing what he was, what his position was, and what he felt was his due. He told them that he had once preached and administered the sacrament in a ‘neighboring church,’ that many of them had ‘seen’ him there. This quelled them, at least for the moment, and he could start to preach.¹¹¹

Justo Gonzalez, in his book *The Story of Christianity* says “Wesley had no interest in founding a new denomination. His purpose was to awaken and cultivate the faith of the masses in the Church of England, as Pietism was doing for German Lutheranism.”¹¹² That cultivation demanded extensive travel by Wesley, and to sound his voice wherever he found a pulpit or listening ears. He constantly endured opposition. Abelow says “most [local powers] threw their weight into the scale against him. So general and so firm was their opposition that wherever they were, Wesley had little success in gaining followers.”¹¹³ Kinghorn claims “the Church of England had fallen into decline because it had neglected the essential doctrines on which it was founded. Methodism did not advocate any new doctrines; Methodism’s purpose was simply to help the church recover its avowed message and mission.”¹¹⁴

Whereas Wesley may have been seeking to help the church recover its mission, his greater concern was self-liberation. Wesley had evolved from a childhood and faith journey of discipline, rituals and scholarly teachings. Norwood, in the book *The Story of American Methodism* wrote, “out of the university came a highly educated, seriously

¹¹¹ Abelow, 10.

¹¹² Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 2, 1st ed. (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1985), 213.

¹¹³ Abelow, 11.

¹¹⁴ Kinghorn, 13.

intent, somewhat stuffy young man ordained to the Anglican priesthood.”¹¹⁵ On the other hand, within the wall of intellectualism, Wesley had not gained liberation that provided him with a clear understanding of Christ in his life. He sought liberation through a personal Christian experience. As co-founder of the Holy Club and Methodism, John established a ministry with prisoners, the homeless, miners, and workers. His connection with them gave him a glimpse of his mission in serving Christ. Through those humble experiences, Wesley was seeking liberation through a personal spiritual conversion. That conversion came during a prayer meeting on Aldersgate Street in London. Collins wrote,

He moved away from the idea of Christ merely as example or head of the church, and toward the realization of Christ as personal savior whose blood was shed ‘for me.’ He moved toward the conviction that justifying faith is the one thing absolutely necessary for salvation, and realized that this faith is available to ‘thoroughly bruised’ sinners.¹¹⁶

The Civil Rights Movement

Any overview of the Civil Rights Movement as it may apply to Liberation

Theology would not be complete without an understanding of the Transatlantic and Internal Slave Trades. In the late 1400s, as European exploration expanded, the rich crop of sugar was found in South America. The European explorers, in their need for labors, initiated the purchase of slaves from Africa, which gave birth to the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Adam Hochschild, in his book, *Bury the Chains* says the Transatlantic Slave Trade “depended on the fact that most of the societies of Africa had their own systems of

¹¹⁵ Frederick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1974), 25.

¹¹⁶ Collins, 31-32.

slavery. People were enslaved as punishment for crimes, as payment for debt, or, most commonly of all, as prisoners of war.”¹¹⁷ The African system of slavery was consistent with the system of ancient slavery, which had existed from the beginning of humankind.

Early use of the term slave is found in Genesis 9:26, “blessed by the Lord my God be Shem; and let Canaan be his slave.” Origin of the term *slave* is traced to the Hebrew word *ebed* which is also translated *servant*. *Ebed* was an ancient tradition—a way of life. Generally, persons serving in this capacity were treated humanely and with respect. The greatest example of *ebed* is found in Genesis 37-41 whereby Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers, and later the Pharaoh “set him over all the land of Egypt” (Gen. 41:43).

With the birth of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the ancient system of *ebed* changed from one of humaneness and respect to inhumanness and disrespect. As explorers made the buying and selling of slaves a profitable market, African villagers were forced and/or encouraged to cooperate by providing young boys and girls, ages 12-25, for the slave trade. Through acts of warfare, kidnaping or any means necessary, young boys and girls were torn from their families and shipped to the far off lands of North and South America.

David W. Blight, in the book *Passages to Freedom* provides some shocking images of the inhumanity of the slave trade:

As to emphasize their inferiority, some were tagged with names more akin to barnyard animals.... Whatever they were called, they rarely bore surnames, as their owners sought to obliterate marks of lineage and deny them adulthood...

¹¹⁷ Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), 16.

Beyond the dehumanizing affronts were the grotesque mutilations, as slaveholders terrorized those they deemed to be their human property.... Violence, isolation, exhaustion, and alienation often led African slaves to profound depression and occasionally to self-destruction.¹¹⁸

David Eltis wrote, “between 1501 and 1867, the Transatlantic Slave Trade claimed an estimated 12.5 million Africans and involved almost every country with an Atlantic coastline.”¹¹⁹ In 1808, after the U.S. Congress ended the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the agriculture and plantation expansion in the south gave birth to the Internal Slave Trade. This included “taking slaves from the North and the Upper South and transferring them to the expansion plantation frontier.”¹²⁰ Although many in society may not want to learn or relive the painful history of the past, liberation requires the knowledge of the past in order to understand the need for liberation in any form.

In 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution ended the Internal Slave Trade [American slavery]. This historic legislation also included the promise that former slaves and all people of African descent could enjoy the privileges outlined in The Declaration of Independence: *Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness*. These provisions could serve to remind slave owners of the biblical warning, “hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land” (Amos 8:4). Miguel De La Torre, in his book *Reading the Bible from the Margins* wrote, “those who

¹¹⁸ David W. Blight, ed. *Passages to Freedom: The Underground Railroad in History and Memory* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2004), 19-23.

¹¹⁹ David Eltis, “Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.”; available from <http://yalepress.yale.edu/book.asp?isbn=9780300124606> (accessed July 10, 2011).

¹²⁰ Blight, 30.

belonged to the dominant culture of Amos' time were good people who were faithful in their religiosity. They attended worship and offered sacrifices, yet they reconciled religious practices with an economic system that benefited them at the expense of others."¹²¹ The reality of the slave trade was in conflict with the words of Amos and other biblical teachings.

However, the inhumanity of the Transatlantic and Internal Slave Trades left residual damage that continued to exist long after the Thirteenth Amendment of 1865. The lingering damage of American slavery continued to divide the black and white population in every aspect of life. In many parts of the nation, through a system of laws to enforce legalized segregation, black citizens were not allowed to work in government jobs or obtain meaningful employment in many other businesses. There was legalized segregation in public schools, housing, restaurants, restrooms, recreational areas, public beaches, parks, and even in laundry business. In many instances, blacks were not allowed to look at white women, and were expected to step off the sidewalk when approached by a white person. There was segregated public transportation, and if non-segregated transportation was allowed, black passengers were forced to sit in the back of the vehicle. If white passengers did not have a seat, the black passenger was required to stand up or leave the vehicle. Through the system of legalized segregation, blacks, throughout the southern states were not allowed vote, and if they did, threats and intimidation

¹²¹ Miguel A. De La Torre, *Reading the Bible from the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 162.

discouraged them from voting. James Cone, in his book *My Soul Looks Back* says “the struggle to survive with dignity was not easy.”¹²²

These and other conditions of dehumanization gave rise to the Civil Rights Movement. Many years before that era, God promised the Israelites, “I will free you from being slaves” (Ex. 6:6). Human freedom was at the core of the actions of African Americans prior to and during the era of the Civil Rights Movement. Timothy Gorringer, in his book, *Against Hegemony* wrote, “the will for health of the individual must therefore take also the form of the will to improve, raise and perhaps radically transform the general living conditions of all men.... The existence of human beings, like the existence of God, is a being in act, the realization of freedom.”¹²³ The many acts of forced enslavement implanted deep scars on people of African descent. The scars were transferred to descendants of slaves and former slaves. In many cases, descendants in present day society continue their search for liberation. This dilemma is noted in the book, *The Substance of Things Hoped For* by Samuel Proctor who explains how these scars caused the oppressed to:

Grow to hate their identity in such an obsessive way that it paralyzes constructive responses to the ordinary challenges of life. Some go to work every day, angry that they have to negotiate for space to feel comfortable. They bob and weave to fend off remarks that sound racial, whether they are or not. They must prove that they can think in the abstract, that they tell the truth, and they don’t steal. They must guard against any gesture or behavior that inadvertently might

¹²² James H. Cone, *My Soul Looks Back* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 21.

¹²³ Timothy J. Gorringer, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 212.

echo the stereotype. They must be detached, avoiding those who want to impose their 'love' on them in order to prove that they are not racist.¹²⁴

The Civil Rights Movement sought to gain that freedom through various steps of non-violent actions. A primary goal in securing freedom was to remove the laws of legalized segregation. The steps to this change would involve helping the oppressed understand the need to endure additional sufferings to bring about liberation. The steps would involve non-violent protest in efforts to gain attention to the unjust laws and conditions of dehumanization. Unfortunately, many of the churches and religious leaders failed to respond with actions that reflected a true understanding of Christianity. The depth of the problem was often expressed through the voice of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as summarized in an excerpt from his "Letter from Birmingham Jail:"

I have heard numerous southern religious leaders admonish their worshipers to comply with a desegregation decision because it is the law, but I have longed to hear white ministers declare: 'Follow this decree because integration is morally right and because the Negro is your brother.' In the midst of blatant injustices inflicted upon the Negro, I have watched white churchmen stand on the sideline and mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities. In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard many ministers say: 'Those are social issues, with which the gospel has no real concern.' And I have watched many churches commit themselves to a completely otherworldly religion, which makes a strange, un-Biblical distinction between body and soul, between the sacred and the secular.¹²⁵

The oppressed moved forward with their defiant acts of non-violence. They toiled with organized protest marches, in violation of marching and other laws for the purpose

¹²⁴ Samuel D. Proctor, *The Substance of Things Hoped For: A Memoir of African-American Faith* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), 189.

¹²⁵ Catherine L. Albanese, ed., *American Spiritualities: A Reader* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), 359.

of being arrested. The arrests would result in certain convictions, which gave the attorneys for the civil rights leaders, through the legal process, the opportunity to appeal the convictions. Through the continued actions of non-violence, the appeal of the convictions would result in the cases being presented to the U.S. Supreme Court. In case after case, the convictions were overturned, and laws were changed. Throughout the years of hatred, confrontations, arrests, and brutality by the oppressors, the demonstrators, black and white, remained disciplined in acts of peace, healing and reconciliation.

This historic movement was based on the demand for freedom, and was rooted in the words of Christ, “so if the Son makes you free, you will be free” (John 8:36). Vincent Harding, in his book *There Is a River* says the petition was “pointing specifically to the teaching of the Bible and the theoretical doctrines of the white churches.”¹²⁶ The birth of the church was to meet a variety of needs, including reminding the oppressed and the oppressors through the creeds of the church. On the issue of civil rights and oppression,

Cone wrote, “black churches forgot about their unique historical and theological identity and began to preach a gospel no different from that of white churches.”¹²⁷

Theological Foundation

On January 31, 1865, the House of Representatives passed the Thirteenth Amendment to United States Constitution abolishing slavery in the United States. After

¹²⁶ Vincent Harding, *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1981), 43.

¹²⁷ Cone, *My Soul Looks Back*, 66.

nearly four hundred years of forced enslavement, people of African descent were led to believe they could benefit from the rights incorporated in The Declaration of Independence, including “we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” However, as the 1950s arrived, the concept of slavery and the embedded perceptions of inferiority, people of African descent were not allowed access to the freedoms guaranteed in that historic document.

Although the chains of enslavement were legally removed hundreds of years earlier, the invisible chains remained. The oppression of enslavement was continuing in many other venues. They were chains in the form of legalized segregation, and various other written and unwritten laws that expressed racial hatred and bigotry [previously discussed]. In addition, these chains established the criteria for the oppressed that defined how they should view Christ. During the 1950s and 60s, the Civil Rights Movement set into motion an awareness of these deadly chains. The Movement forced our nation to take action to bring liberation to the millions of African Americans who were suffering from these unjust conditions. The Movement also set into motion the concept of “black power.” Unfortunately, reference to black power evokes fear within the hearts of many of our white brothers and sisters. The term usually creates images of racial hostility, rebellion, and unjustified radicalism. James Cone, in his book *Black Theology and Black Power* wrote, “black power means black freedom, black determination, wherein black

people no longer view themselves without human dignity but as men, human beings with the ability to carve out their own destiny.”¹²⁸

James Cone, born August 5, 1938, as a resident of Arkansas was a witness and a victim of those chains and sufferings. Cone, in his article “Black Theology and Black Liberation” wrote:

Our slavery was not limited to physical bondage. Added to physical domination was the mental enslavement of black people—the internalization of the values of slave masters. We were required to deny our African past and to affirm the European values that were responsible for our enslavement. At worst, this meant accepting the slave conditions as ordained by God.¹²⁹

Based on this revelation, Cone did not confine the need for liberation to socio-economic concerns. For Cone, there was a need for liberation from the perception of Christianity as imposed on black citizens by the European captors. As a member in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Cone came to recognize that liberation from the obvious chains of the sociopolitical struggle would not be complete without the liberation of black theology. Cone says,

It calls upon black people to affirm God because he has affirmed us. His affirmation of black people is made known not only in his election of oppressed Israel, but more especially in his coming to us and being rejected in Christ for us. The event of Christ tells us that the oppressed blacks are his people because, and only because, they represent who he is.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Minneapolis, MN: The Seabury Press, 1969), 6.

¹²⁹ Cone, “Black Theology and Black Liberation”, James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, ed. *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, vol. 1 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 107.

¹³⁰ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 118.

Later, as a college student, Cone chose the topic of black theology as a literary assignment and wrote:

Seeing so many courageous ministers leading the struggle for justice in the name of the gospel, and also seeing the support of church people, undoubtedly had much to do with why I chose the ministry as my vocation, and also why I chose liberation as the theme of my perspective in black theology. How could I write about black theology and overlook the theme of liberation.¹³¹

Christianity was established and grew out of the beliefs and teachings of Jesus. It was deeply rooted in his suffering, death and resurrection. For many of the faithful, the liberation movement seemed radical and a threat to the movement of Christ. It was in direct conflict with the validity of “traditional” Christianity. In response to the growing conflict, Machen wrote, “the chief modern rival of Christianity is ‘liberation.’ An examination of the teachings of liberalism in comparison with those of Christianity will show that at every point the two movements are in direct opposition.”¹³²

In 1979, Alfred Hennelly in his book *Theologies in Conflict* wrote, “a growing awareness is rising to the surface throughout all the Christian churches today that Christianity has arrived at a great turning point, a watershed with immeasurable consequences for the future.”¹³³ The comment expressed by Hennelly was in response to documents “presented by Gustavo Gutierrez at a conference [Medellin] held in the city of

¹³¹ Cone, *My Soul Looks Back*, 24.

¹³² Machen, 53.

¹³³ Alfred T. Hennelly, *Theologies in Conflict: The Challenge of Juan Luis Segundo* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 1.

Chimbote, Peru in July 1968.”¹³⁴ The Medellin Conference was a meeting of Roman Catholic bishops of Latin America. Gutierrez, a Dominican priest, challenged the church to examine its past relative to its response in addressing the needs of the oppressed in Latin America. He further alleged that Christianity, whether intentional or unintentional, was excluding millions of people throughout the world.

The root of the conflict, as presented by Gutierrez focused on social and economic oppression against those who were less able to address these alleged actions of injustice. The allegations presented during the conference were scathing indictments suggesting that the church was ignoring the misery and oppression of the poor. The poor were considered the primary victims of that exclusion. Rosino Gibellini, in the book *The Liberation Theology Debate* wrote:

First of all the theology of liberation presupposes a prior political and ethical option in the light of the gospel, for the poor: liberation theology has chosen the option of evaluating social reality from the viewpoint of the poor, of reflecting theologically from the cause of the poor and acting for liberation of the poor.¹³⁵

Based on various circumstances of the Medellin Conference, including the significance of the Roman Catholic faith as well as the nature and prominence gained from the allegations, Gutierrez and the Conference are often inaccurately cited with giving birth to the movement that became known as Liberation Theology.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 2.

¹³⁵ Rosino Gibellini, *The Liberation Theology Debate* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 9.

Cone, from the inception of Liberation Theology addressed the issues of being liberated from oppression in any form, especially the poor. He was not promoting a theology exclusively for the blacks or the poor in America. Rather, he sought to serve notice that the gospel of Jesus Christ should address conditions of oppression throughout the world. In his book *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Cone wrote,

The black theologian must reject any conception of God, which stifles black self-determination by picturing God as a God of all peoples. Either God is identified with the oppressed to the point that their experience becomes God's experience, or God is a God of racism.... By electing Israelite slaves as the people of God and by becoming the Oppressed One in Jesus Christ, the human race is made to understand that God is known where human beings experience humiliation and suffering.¹³⁶

Arthur F. McGovern, in his book, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics* wrote, “most historians present the institutional church overall as playing a very conservative political role in the past, aligned for the most part with the landowning class.”¹³⁷ This “class” tends to focus its attention on the maintenance and well being of its power and influence. Carlyle Steward, in his book *God, Being and Liberation* wrote “Once specific persons are ethically excluded from our sphere of moral concern, which means they are no longer subject to our ethical demands, which means they are no longer candidates for our love, care and concern.”¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 63-64.

¹³⁷ Arthur F. McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics: Toward an Assessment* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 2.

¹³⁸ Carlyle Fielding Steward III, *God, Being and Liberation: A Comparative Analysis of the Theologies and Ethics of James H. Cone and Howard Thurman* (New York, NY University Press of America, 1989), 217.

As the black theology of Cone evolved into being known as Liberation Theology, Gutierrez seized the opportunity to use this theme as the foundation for his message to bring attention to the oppression of the poor in Latin America. Reaching the poor and the oppressed was a major focus during the ministry of Jesus who said “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18-19). Gustavo Gutierrez, in an article in *Christianity and Crisis* professed,

Liberation Theology seeks a language to speak about God, a prophetic language that affirms the link between God and the poor. Prophetic language involves not only preaching, but also our deeds, what we do.... One way to tell poor people that God loves you is to say: ‘God does not love your situation. Your poverty is contrary to the will of God. Poverty is death, and the Kingdom of God is the kingdom of life.’ We must emphasize this because poor people are often resigned to the situation. One should not accept it because it is inhumane. It is not Christian. It is not God-ordained.¹³⁹

Liberation Theology became the vessel for Gutierrez in the examination and interpretation of Scripture through the lens of the powerless. De La Torre wrote, “when the dominant culture makes its reality normative for the rest of the world, the Bible becomes domesticated and hence ceases to be relevant.”¹⁴⁰

During the era of the Transatlantic and Internal Slave Trades, American slave owners refused to allow slaves to read the Bible. The slave owners were fearful of the slaves knowing the truth. The truth of liberation is rooted in Scripture, which has its beginning and its ending. The absence of Scripture leads to weakness: weakness in faith, and weakness in the understanding of oppression. It results in a state of bondage. James

¹³⁹ Martin A. Lee and Pia Gallegos, “Gustavo Gutierrez: With the Poor,” *Christianity in Crisis*, 47, no. 1 (February 1987), 113.

¹⁴⁰ De La Torre, 8.

Cone, in his book *Speaking the Truth* says “Scripture can liberate theology to be Christian in the contemporary situation.”¹⁴¹ This concept evolved from the needs of those who felt oppressed. They were voices of various sociocultural, racial and ethnic groups who interpret their experiences in the Christian faith. In their book *Introduction to Theology*, Owen Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra note how “the last several decades have seen the emergence and development of black or African American Theology, Asian Theology, Feminist Theology, and many more.”¹⁴²

These groups evolved based on experiences of race, class and gender oppression. Their voices advanced to remind the church of the words spoken by Jesus in Luke 4:18 that he was sent by God to “proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.” Jesus gave his body so that all may be free, especially the oppressed. De La Torre writes,

Christ takes sides with those who are being oppressed, those who are today’s crucified. This means that Christ takes a stand against those who are oppressing them, that is, those from the dominant culture who, due to unwarranted power and privilege, benefit at the expense of the powerless. Christ resides among those who are suffering oppression, who live in want, who have misery as a companion.¹⁴³

The church, representing the body of Christ has the task of continuing that message. As the body, the church is responsible for bringing freedom to the oppressed.

¹⁴¹ Cone, *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans 1986), 8.

¹⁴² Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology*, 3rd ed. (Harrisburg, Pa.: Morehouse, 2002), 6-7.

¹⁴³ De La Torre, 133.

Often, as the church leads the way, conflict is necessary. Fray writes, “conflict must be accepted as inevitable in any church that exposes itself to the world in the name of Christ and seeks to respond to the needs it encounters.”¹⁴⁴ Church leaders became aware of this reality during the Civil Rights Movement. According to David Lewis in his book *King: A Critical Biography*, Dr. King said: “I’m tired of preachers riding around in big cars, living in fine homes, but not willing to take their part in the fight.... If you can’t stand up with your people, you are not fit to be a leader!”¹⁴⁵ Lewis emphasizes the need for Dr. King to confront his fellow clergy on their theological grounds and their unwillingness to stand up for those being mistreated.

Dr. King and other civil rights advocates presented those kinds of challenges, which created additional conflicts. However, their challenges were intertwined with messages of love. Andrew Sung Park, in *A Dream Unfinished* says “before we challenge our offenders, however, we need to love them. In fact, if we love them, we come to confront their injustice. It is not confrontation that changes people, but love.”¹⁴⁶ The Messiah avowed this foundation saying, “No one has greater love than this” (Jn. 15:13). His love was displayed through continuous teachings of forgiveness, and its role as a major element in Christian living and salvation. These should be common practices when encountering challenges in our family, community and especially in the church. Park

¹⁴⁴ Fray, 34.

¹⁴⁵ David L. Lewis, *King: A Critical Biography* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1971), 179.

¹⁴⁶ Andrew Sung Park, “A Theology of Transmutation”, Fernandez, Eleazar S. and Fernando F. Segovia, 161.

adds, “When we challenge our offenders or enemies, we need to respect them as well. We need to treat them as honorably as possible, although they may not deserve our respect. It is in dignity, not degradation, that people experience change.”¹⁴⁷

Gibellini wrote, “according to the Christian concept of love, there is identification between love of God and love of neighbor, to the degree that the one who loves his or her neighbor loves God; just as God is to be encountered in the neighbor, so salvation is to be encountered in historical liberation.”¹⁴⁸ Although Christ came as an example of love and reconciliation, the life of the church has routinely become a place of unhealthy conflicts. Often, the quest for power serves as the driving force for divisiveness. Paul Avis, in his book *Authority Leadership and Conflict in the Church* wrote,

It is one of the supreme ironies of Christianity that, while in its daily prayer it ascribes ‘the power and the glory’ to God alone, it is itself deeply implicated in the pursuit, the retention and the exercise of power, and its leaders have not been averse to a share of the glory. In its battle for the hearts and minds of humanity the Church is pitted against other ideologies – secularism, hedonism, atheistic materialism and other militant faiths – in a power struggle.¹⁴⁹

For the founders of Liberation Theology, Christianity was not answering their hurts and pains. Many felt imprisoned by an interpretation that seemed to be designed for a specific segment of society. Lan wrote, “the authority of the Bible can no more hide behind the unchallenged belief that it is the Word of God, nor by an appeal to a church tradition which has been defined by white, male, clerical power. The poor, women, and

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 162.

¹⁴⁸ Gibellini, 22.

¹⁴⁹ Paul Avis, *Authority, Leadership, and Conflict in the Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International, 1992), 16-17.

other marginalized people are asking whether the Bible can be of help in the global struggle for liberation.”¹⁵⁰

The primary premise of liberation is the release from bondage: the bondage of not knowing the truth. This bondage was echoed by the prophet Jeremiah who wrote, “He judged the cause of the poor and needy; and then it was well. Is not this to know me? declares the Lord” (Jer. 22:16). As Christians, knowing Christ is to understand his teachings of love, peace, and social justice. Paul, in Galatians 5:1 says, “For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” For the millions of blacks in America who continued to suffer from the bondage of slavery, the message of Jesus, when translated through the lens of the oppressor was a form of continued bondage. Joseph Johnson, in the book *Black Theology* says, “The tragedy of the interpretations of Jesus by the white American theologian during the last three hundred years is that Jesus has been too often identified with the oppressive structures and forces of the prevailing society.”¹⁵¹

Faced with this potential polarization, the liberation theologians were challenging leaders of the church to help congregations come to know Christ, and to use that awareness as guidance in responding to conflicts. The liberation movement contends a solution is possible through careful study and understanding of the person of Jesus the Christ. Rufus Burrow, in his book *James H. Cone and Black Liberation Theology* says

¹⁵⁰ Lan, 294.

¹⁵¹ Joseph A. Johnson, Jr., “Jesus the Liberator,” James H. Cone, *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, vol. 1 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 204.

“persons who suffer as a result of domination and dehumanization do not have to wait until a study has been completed, or until ‘concerned’ individuals have engaged in critical reflection and theorizing about their suffering.”¹⁵² This motif requires reflecting upon the mission and work of Christ to achieve salvation for the oppressed. It involves using the model of Christ in unlocking the constraints of injustice to all who are victims to social and economic structures. As stated by Burrow, “the starting point is solidarity with the oppressed and commitment to actions geared toward enhancing all persons.”¹⁵³

Knowledge of Christ gives awareness to the poor, disadvantaged and marginalized, but should result in all Christians living out their faith through examples of love, giving, and concern for social justice. Otto Maduro, in the book by Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price, *A New Handbook of Christian Theology* writes, “the reign of God becomes the ultimate criterion out of which Christians can judge, critique, define, transform, correct, confess, convert, and repent of our ways—including the ways in which we understand, organize, and live as church.”¹⁵⁴

Alfred T. Hennelly, in his book *Liberation Theologies* states, “in order to know Christ one must first follow Christ, that is, ‘everything we know or say about Jesus must

¹⁵² Rufus Burrow, Jr., *James H. Cone and Black Liberation Theology* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company Inc., 1994), 33.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 34.

¹⁵⁴ Otto Maduro, “Liberation Theology,” in *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, ed. Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), 192.

be continually confirmed, clarified, and perhaps corrected in the praxis of living his vision within the changing contexts of history.”¹⁵⁵ Hennelly, in his book *Theologies in Conflict* says “praxis has constituted the linchpin of liberation theology.”¹⁵⁶ Praxis, a Greek word,

Is understood by liberation theologians in the sense of the combination of theory and action. When, for example, base communities decide to build a school or clinic for their neighborhood, they are involved in praxis. Their action on behalf of the community is informed and motivated by their Christian values. Their combined ideas and energies produce what is called liberatory praxis.¹⁵⁷

The motif involves taking an active and demonstrative role in the expression of personal faith. The role, through the lens of liberation theologians, means freeing the oppressed from injustice and despair. A primary theme for liberation advocates is repeating the message of insensitivity of oppressors. Based on the oppressed lack of awareness and life experiences in suffering, the oppressor does not recognize the harm suffered by the oppressed. Carlyle Steward, in his book *God, Being and Liberation* wrote,

The oppressed and oppressors ‘know’ the oppression is immoral and unjust. But oppressors unremittently continue their oppression. Knowledge of the rightness although it presupposes some socially learned experience. Rather, individuals instinctively ‘know’ that any activity alienating and disrupting God’s fundamental purpose for human community is in utter violation of the principle of community, irrespective of the rationalizations offered justifying it.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Alfred T. Hennelly, *Liberation Theologies: The Global Pursuit of Justice* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1995), 305.

¹⁵⁶ Hennelly, *Theologies in Conflict*, 87.

¹⁵⁷ Curt Cadorette, Marie Giblin, Mariyn J. Legge, and Mary Hembrow Snyder, *Liberation Theology : An Introductory Reader* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992), 298.

¹⁵⁸ Steward, 260.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus lectured on liberation. His lectures were often directed at the corrupt hearts of the Pharisees. They often justified their oppressive actions through their offerings and outward appearances. Jesus, seeing the stains of their hearts warned, [you] “have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy” (Mat. 23:23). The Pharisees, in their quest for power and status, were primarily concerned with self. Scientists and others spend countless time and resources to end the many diseases of the world. Yet, there appears to be a shortage of resources in addressing the needs of the oppressed. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, in his book *Where Do We Go from Here*, wrote “we have amazing knowledge of vitamins, nutrition, the chemistry of food and the versatility of atoms. There is no deficit in human resources; the deficit is in human will.”¹⁵⁹

The Role of Peace, Healing and Reconciliation

Jesus began his ministry emphasizing, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Mat. 5:9). In the Old Testament, peace [shalom] “can be translated as ‘prosperity, well-being, health, completeness, and safety.’”¹⁶⁰ In 1 Samuel 25:6, David gives his army instructions to greet Nabal saying “peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have.” In the New Testament, peace [eirene] has Greek and Hebrew translations. In Greek, “eirene describes a situation that results from the cessation of hostilities or war and can also refer to the state of law and

¹⁵⁹ Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1967), 177.

¹⁶⁰ William D. Mounce, ed., *Mounce's Complete Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 2006), 502.

order that makes the fruits of prosperity possible.”¹⁶¹ In contrast, the Hebrew use of *eirene* relates to “a state of being that lacks nothing and has no fear of being troubled in its tranquility; it is euphoria coupled with security.”¹⁶²

Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount with a mandate to the disciples to serve as peacemakers, which involves resolving conflicts. This premise is echoed by the United Methodist Church in *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* which states, “we are called to love our enemies, seek justice, and serve as reconcilers of conflict.”¹⁶³ This statement of commitment to peace is reaffirmed in *The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church* which emphasizes the mandate for local congregations to “teach and practice peacemaking, to study underlying causes of conflict among social groups and nations, to seek positive remedies and become instruments of peace.”¹⁶⁴ A major aftermath of disagreements often results in winners and losers. The winner/loser perception by either party, most often results in future conflicts. Avoiding this negative reality involves a successful effort in promoting peace, healing and reconciliation. In view of this concern the United Methodist Church emphasizes the need to “work together to resolve by peaceful means every dispute.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 503.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Harriet Jane Olson, ed., *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2008* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2008), 128-29.

¹⁶⁴ Olson, “6091, A Call for Peacemaking”, in *The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church 2008* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2008), 850.

¹⁶⁵ Olson, *The Book of Discipline*, 129.

Fenton writes, “when we think of peacemakers, maybe we think about statesmen and negotiators, grappling with the problems caused by conflicting national ambitions, nuclear proliferation, and oppressed peoples crying out for justice throughout the world.”¹⁶⁶ From the beginning of time, peace has been and continues to be an elusive stone in building the kingdom of God. Myron Augsburger, in his book *The Peacemaker* says “the essence of God’s peace is wholeness, the well-being of persons. And this peace, or ‘shalom,’ is a work of God’s grace for the wholeness of life.”¹⁶⁷

Life is filled with conflicts, which means the church will never be free of unpleasant behavior and disagreements from its members. The disagreements are often rooted in the values of domination. Gilbert Rendle, in his book *Behavioral Covenants in Congregations* points to a “bigger picture, described from any number of perspectives, [and] the story of one generation over and against the other.”¹⁶⁸ Jesus warned,

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household (Mat. 10:34-36).

Whereas these prophetic words may sound dismal, they are proven to be truth in every ministry and in every denomination. Conflicts are often compared to a military battlefield, which leaves behind extensive “collateral damage.” In the context of the military, collateral damage refers to any unintentional damage to civil property, as well as

¹⁶⁶ Fenton, 135.

¹⁶⁷ Myron S. Augsburger, *The Peacemaker* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 21.

¹⁶⁸ Gilbert R. Rendle, *Behavioral Covenants in Congregations: A Handbook for Honoring Differences* (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 1999), 16.

civilian casualties. Joseph Phelps, in his book *More Light Less Heat* writes, “it is imperative that participants in the church’s battles remember this: collateral damage is people—relationships, lives, and livelihoods.”¹⁶⁹ More so, the initiators of the battles engage the enemy with little concern for the intended and unintended victims. The forces often advance under the banner of “we must win, they must lose.” Horace Fenton, in his book *When Christians Clash* writes,

Settling disputes between Christians ought never to leave the victors arrogantly triumphant or the losers battered beyond recognition. The strategy of the apostles compels us twentieth-century Christians to ask ourselves some probing questions such as ‘How much closer would be to true unity in Christ today if we were ready to respect the feelings of our vanquished foes and to make concessions to them in areas where our integrity is not compromised by doing so.’¹⁷⁰

Christians, through their membership and association with the church, represent the household of Christ. Within that household, conflicts are expected. As members of that household, Christians are expected to model the behavior of peacemaking. That objective is constantly in conflict with the elements of original sin, which causes human creation to rebel against God. Even under those adverse circumstances, the church must be ready to take the initiative in addressing matters of conflicts in a peaceful and caring manner.

David Augsburger, in his book *Caring Enough to Confront* writes, “caring people who dare to be present with people when they are hurting and stand with people

¹⁶⁹ Joseph Phelps, *More Light, Less Heat: How Dialogue Can Transform Christian Conflicts into Growth* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 6.

¹⁷⁰ Fenton, 99.

where they are hurting. Peacemaking begins by truly being there for others.”¹⁷¹ A major ingredient of any effort of peace involves the application of healing. R. K. Harrison, in his article “Healing” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* describes healing “in terms of the curing or restoring to health of a sick person, whether by promoting the closure of wounds, repairing the results of accidents or surgical disease, or administering effective treatment for specific pathological conditions of the body or mind.”¹⁷² The need for healing was evident shortly after breath entered human flesh. In Genesis 1:27 “God created humankind in his image.” Although the Bible refers to the creation of humans in the image of God, that image does not include physical characteristics. The image may contain “some attribute or combination of attributes, such as rationality, will, freedom, responsibility, or the like.”¹⁷³ With that image, man was created in wholeness – a total human being. This image is the basis for relationship between God and humans.

Through original sin, that wholeness became broken, which set the stage for revolving acts of sin and conflict. This is evident through the poison of anger, hatred and retaliation that seep into the veins of the church’s blood system. Battle lines are often drawn between the best of friends and family. When Saul told his son Jonathan to kill David, Jonathan warned “The king should not sin against his servant David, because he

¹⁷¹ David Augsburger, *Caring Enough to Confront: How to Understand and Express Your Deepest Feelings Towards Others* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1986), 127.

¹⁷² R. K. Harrison, “Healing”, in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 2, ed. G. A. Buttrick, et. al. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1962), 541-548.

¹⁷³ *Illumina Gold*, “Image of God” (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002).

has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have been of good service to you” (1 Sam. 19:4). Although Saul seemed to respect the wishes of Jonathan, later,

Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan. He said to him, ‘you son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse lives upon the earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be established’ (1 Sam. 20:30).

Haugk wrote, “brokenness for the Hebrews meant spiritual, emotional, and physical brokenness all at once. When the Hebrews were healed they were made whole. There were no separate cures for the physical, spiritual, and emotional. Health was a divine, holistic gift.”¹⁷⁴ That brokenness required healing. Haugk says, “the cause and result of all such brokenness was a broken relationship with God. Before healing could take place, the relationship with God had to be restored, or made whole.”¹⁷⁵ The results of any conflict can result in massive harm—collateral damage. The damage may include bruises, wounds and scars. They all require urgent care. They need prompt and sufficient healing. Fenton says

Settling disputes between Christians ought never to leave the victors arrogantly triumphant or the losers battered beyond recognition. The strategy of the apostles compels us twentieth-century Christians to ask ourselves some probing questions such as, ‘How much closer would we be to true unity in Christ today if we were ready to respect the feelings of our vanquished foes and to make concessions to them in areas where our integrity is not compromised by doing so?’¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Haugk, 62.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Fenton, 99.

Following this motif should help remove the difficulty of reaching out to one who has brought harm; extending a helping hand to the aggressor; and taking steps to promote personal healing. Although the healing process may present challenges, the steps are necessary to address issues of mental health and for spiritual growth. These steps of self-reflection, interpersonal repentance, including the recognition and admission of personal contributions to the dispute are vital ingredients for reconciliation.

E. C. Blackman, in his article “Reconciliation” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* defines reconciliation as “the coming to agreement of two or more persons after misunderstanding or estrangement.”¹⁷⁷ This definition is based on the premise of division between two persons. Some event or circumstance has resulted in discord and disharmony. There is a broken relationship. Walter Burghardt, in his book *Towards Reconciliation* offers the following observations:

In the first place, there is disunity between man and nature. By ‘nature’ I mean all that is not man or God.... Second, this disunity, between man and nature is a symbol, and to some extent an effect, of the disunity that exists within man himself.... Third, this disunity within man himself is a symbol, and to some extent a cause, of the disunity that prevails between man and man.... Fourth, all these disunities – man and nature, man himself, man and man – are but a symptom, and in great measure an effect, of the most tragic disunity of all: the rupture between man and God.¹⁷⁸

Regardless of the brokenness, disunity or dismantling that gives life to conflict; they all represent a rebellion, alienation and hostility against God. How can the people of

¹⁷⁷ E. C. Blackman, “Reconciliation,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 4, ed. G. A. Buttrick et al. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1962), 16-17.

¹⁷⁸ Burghardt, 2-3.

God resolve and mend the severity of conflicts? Janice Haken, in the book *Before Forgiving* writes, “forgiveness is commonly introduced in discussions of conflict resolution as an essential part of the process of reconciliation and is often assumed to be a necessary condition for a successful outcome.”¹⁷⁹ Raymond Helmick and Rodney Petersen, in the book *Forgiveness and Reconciliation* note, “in the history of the church the practice of forgiveness has been clearly tied to penitence, most often privatized as a part of individual religious practice since the early medieval period.”¹⁸⁰

In order to achieve reconciliation, forgiveness appears to be paramount. Forgiveness is invoking the freedom of choice—the willingness to work through a disagreement. It requires one to give unconditional pardon with no strings attached. The thought of forgiveness, even in the church, is often replaced with the agenda of “getting even.” David Wenham, in his book *Paul* writes, “forgiving ‘just as the Lord has forgiven you’ is reminiscent of the Johannine ‘love one another as I have loved you,’ but perhaps more of the Matthean parable of the unforgiving servant (Mat. 18:23-35).”¹⁸¹

Even though the Bible serves as the guide for Christians, the church, as a mirror of society struggles with biblical messages. Rodney Clapp, in his book *A Peculiar People* writes,

¹⁷⁹ Janice Haken, “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Psychoanalytic and Cultural Perspectives on Forgiveness,” in *Before Forgiving: Cautionary Views of Forgiveness in Psychotherapy*, ed. Sharon Lamb and Jeffrie G. Murphy (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 182.

¹⁸⁰ Raymond G. Helmick and Rodney L. Petersen, ed., *Forgiveness and Reconciliation* (Radnor, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2001), 4.

¹⁸¹ David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 260.

The church as a culture has its own language and grammar, in which words such as love and service are crucial and are used correctly only according to certain 'rules.' The church as a culture carries and sustains its own way of life, which includes: a particular way of eating, learned in and through the Eucharist; a particular way of handling conflict, the practice of Jesus and his cross.¹⁸²

The apostle Paul, in 2 Corinthians 5:17 writes "so if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" Robert Schreiter, in his book *Reconciliation* writes,

We often think of reconciliation as overcoming alienation for the sake of returning to a peace that is a sort of status quo ante [the way things were before]. But Christian reconciliation never takes us back to where we were before. It is more than the removal of suffering for the victim and conversion for the oppressor. Reconciliation takes us to a new place.¹⁸³

Reconciliation, using the motif of biblical peacemaking requires genuine forgiveness. Further, based on the premise of original sin, reconciliation is necessary for all involved. Everyone is guilty of some degree of sinfulness, which has been forgiven through atonement. In spite of that biblical truth, Christians often fail to show that forgiveness to others. Reconciliation mandates that forgiveness. David Augsburger says it is "being present with another in the here and now. Finish the past by dropping old demands, canceling old criticisms and prejudices. Accept the woman or man who is with you now."¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 89.

¹⁸³ Robert J. Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 55-56.

¹⁸⁴ David Augsburger, 128.

Whenever there is interaction, whether with friends, family or church, conflicts are prone to happen. They cannot be avoided. They all involve the struggle for space, tensions in submitting or not submitting to the will of another. Fenton writes, “if Christians are really called to a ministry of reconciliation between humanity and God, that ministry must include building bridges between groups and individuals who are at war with each other.”¹⁸⁵ They all can create divisiveness and require tools of peacemaking. Peters writes, “the process of reconciliation is to begin privately between individuals. It should never start in the public arena... When people lose face, new barriers will arise that make conflict resolution much more difficult.”¹⁸⁶

This step requires empathy and sincere consideration for the feelings of the other person. It is an opportunity to be the “bigger person” by swallowing your pride. Fenton assesses “a first step would be to admit that their present impasse cannot be the will of God for their relationship. A second step, for both parties, is to admit that if they are to be reconciled, they’ll need more wisdom than they presently possess.”¹⁸⁷ This may require reflections and accepting ownership of one’s personal role in the conflict. If the conflict has human involvement, an apology may serve to reconcile the differences. Peacemaking often involves being a bigger person. Instead of being forced, it should represent a mutual effort to help one another accept individual responsibility. Sande wrote, “reconciliation requires that you give a repentant person an opportunity to demonstrate repentance and

¹⁸⁵ Fenton, 134.

¹⁸⁶ Peters, 74.

¹⁸⁷ Fenton, 142.

regain your trust.”¹⁸⁸ That trust is gained when the involved parties engage in behavior and actions of caring. Above all, “peacemaking proceeds by inviting the past to past, and being present with another in the here and now. Finish the past by dropping old demands, canceling old criticisms and prejudices. Accept the woman or man who is with you now.”¹⁸⁹

Reconciliation is being involved in proactive and loving action. It is an active display of your commitment to glorify God. One can show evidence of that commitment through Sande’s challenge to *Go and Be Reconciled* which includes:

1. Not dwelling on this incident
2. Not bringing up this incident again and using it against you
3. Not talking to others about his incident
4. Not allowing this incident to stand between us or to hinder our personal relationship
5. Replacing painful thoughts and memories with positive thoughts and memories
6. Saying positive things to and about the person whom I have forgiven
7. Doing loving and constructive things to and for the person whom I have forgiven¹⁹⁰

We live in a broken world—stained with the virus of conflict. The church, a mirror of society, does not escape the ills of brokenness—the infection of conflict. Yet, most of us expect to find a perfect church—free of conflicts. If one ever assumes such an edifice

¹⁸⁸ Sande, 219.

¹⁸⁹ David Augsburger, 128.

¹⁹⁰ Sande, 267-68.

exists he should quickly join. At that point, the seed of conflict is certain to have been planted. Although conflicts can be constructive, they usually cause destruction. Amid the destruction, men and women of God are called as peacemakers. One may apply many theories and practices to achieve peace and reconciliation. Above all, peacemaking and reconciliation involve the realization that “the only methodology that will work is centered in absolute reliance upon God to change the condition of human hearts.”¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Peters, 150.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this ministry project proposed that if the members of Belfast United Methodist Church were educated on the nature and handling of conflicts there would be a substantial increase in spiritual maturity, growth in membership, and reduced occurrences of conflicts. This hypothesis was based on information developed during a six months period of service as pastor of the congregation, and the awareness of the history and ongoing unresolved conflicts within the faith community. This awareness led to the belief that adult educational training could serve as a solution in resolving the conflicts within the congregation and provide meaningful guidance in future disagreements.

The purpose of the study was to involve the Belfast participants in a series of educational discussions relative to conflicts and to use the learning to resolve conflicts within the Belfast faith community. The implementation of action research “signals your intent to intervene in and improve your learning in order to improve practice, and accept responsibility for doing so.”¹ Although conflict resolutions differ, “the core of adult education is a view of learning as situated in social, cultural, and material contexts within

¹ Jean McNiff and Jack Whitehead, *You and Your Action Research Project*. 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 35.

which individual experiences are transformed into emancipatory actions through critical reflection.”² It was the belief that education would enhance emancipation and promote the development of skills for healthy management of conflicts which “would be useful to their community.”³ Results from similar studies substantiate that “education leads to changes—changes in the amount of knowledge people have, changes in skills and competencies, changes in the way we communicate and understand each other, changes in our sense of self, and changes in our social world.”⁴ A primary goal in this study is for the transformation of behavior that brings glory to God.

Intervention

In July 2010 unresolved congregational conflicts resulted in approximately fifty of the participating members leaving the congregation. The departing members had been responsible for 60% of the financial contributions. In 1965, unresolved conflicts led to similar results. This study served to provide the congregation education and awareness in the use of Scripture when faced with conflicts. It was the belief that the use of Scripture and other resources would enable the congregation to develop healthy ways of working through conflicts. This would include the development of tools for use in the transformation of their negative responses, first for themselves and then for the congregation. The study was completed in the context of Belfast United Methodist

² Davydd J. Greenwood and Morten Levin, *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 222.

³ Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 10.

⁴ Patricia Cranton, *Professional Development as Transformative Learning: New Perspectives for Teachers of Adults* (San Francisco, CA: The Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996), 160.

Church. This decision was based on the premise that the natural setting “enables the researcher to develop a level of detail about the individual or place and to be highly involved in actual experiences of the participants.”⁵

Inquiry and discussions during a period of six months as pastor determined the conflicts evolved directly out of the need for power. Inquiries determined that power meant to “win only when others lose, and thus as something to be obtained and to be guarded jealously by those who have it.”⁶ Personal desire for power and control was a common thread in the history of conflicts. The absence of Scripture in the faith community appeared to have been a major factor in the failure to resolve conflicts. The deficiency of Scripture usually results in little understanding or misinterpretations of biblical teachings and mandates. The lack of biblical teachings did not allow God to be the center of their lives. Without this insight and understanding, the community of faith did not have the necessary tools for conflict resolution.

Other factors that contributed to unresolved conflicts were personal interpretations of the guidelines of the United Methodist Church. The interpretations were based on personal and/or group traditions, in contrast with the rules and instructions are outlined in *The Book of Discipline* which states that the local church:

Shall be organized so that adequate provision is made for these basic responsibilities: 1) planning and implementing program of nurture outreach, and witness for persons and families within and without the congregation; 2) providing for effective pastoral and lay leadership; 3) providing for financial

⁵ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 181.

⁶ Frederick C. Tiffany and Sharon H. Ringe, *Biblical Interpretation : A Roadmap* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 145

support, physical facilities, and the legal obligations of the church; 4) utilizing the appropriate relationships and resources of the district and annual conference; 5) providing for the proper creation, maintenance, and disposition of documentary record material of the local church; and 6) seeking inclusiveness in all aspects of its life.⁷

Although the United Methodist Church promotes and encourages the study and implementation of procedures outlined in *The Book of Discipline*, little or no effort has been made at Belfast to learn and comply with church policy and rules. The reluctance is primarily based on an “institutional blueprint borrowed from their social and cultural location.”⁸ That blueprint has defined who they are and what the church should look like. That image includes a long history of unresolved conflicts.

The objective of this study was to help the congregation develop and implement the proper tools for healthy management of disagreements without harming relationships with others. This approach would include gaining the assistance of volunteers from the congregation for educational development. The participants would engage in the study and discussion of Scripture and other resources relevant to conflict resolutions, and participate in role-playing for additional insight in working through disagreements. A major barrier in achieving that goal was the conduct of a self-appointed “gate keeper” who did not participate or approve of the project. He had gained the trust and following of a significant number of members and worked to discourage their participation. As the

⁷ Harriet Jane Olson, ed., *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2008* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2008), 157.

⁸ Nancy T. Ammerman, et al, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 79.

gate keeper, he expressed his intent to maintain control of the church, which included oversight of all aspects of the church.

The participants consisted of one male, age 40-50; one male, age 51-60; one female, under age 30; four females, age 40-50; five females, age 51-60; and five females over age 60. Fourteen of the participants were active members and attended worship services regularly. They willingly agreed to participate following verbal requests and written announcements in the bulletin. They expressed their awareness of past church conflicts and were interested in learning how to manage future conflict situations. The study consisted of four 2-3 hour sessions. During the first session, the participants were administered multiple questionnaires to gather data on personal, biblical and conflict awareness information.

The second session included a study and discussions on specific verses in the Old and New Testament involving conflicts and how they were resolved (Appendix E). The third session included the study and discussion on “The Principles of the Four G’s” outlined in the Ken Sande book, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*; completion of worksheets on conflicts; and participation in conflict resolution practical exercises (Appendices F thru I). The fourth session included a review of possible approaches to conflict resolution; facilitating a discussion that led to the group identifying various conflict issues within the church, with the group deciding which of the issues could be resolved. During the discussion, the group identified seven (7) conflict issues, and determined only the issue concerning “pledging” could be resolved.

During the mid-1960s, unresolved conflicts relating to tithing and financial commitments played a major role in dividing the church and the loss of half of its membership. A pretest disclosed fourteen of the fifteen participants did not believe in making a financial commitment. The goal was to determine 1) whether the group members could engage in healthy debates on the topic of pledging, and 2) whether there was a significant transformation by the participants concerning pledging and financial commitment to the church.

Research Design

The purpose of the ministry model was to study the barriers to the resolution of church conflicts, and explore educational strategies of biblical and other resources in promoting a transformation to achieve peace, healing and reconciliation. Unresolved disagreements had an established history of adversely affecting all aspects of the ministry. It was the belief that the participants could benefit from the informational learning of the factors that impede resolution to church conflicts. The concept of peace, healing and reconciliation was viewed as paramount in maintaining a relationship with God and a spiritually healthy church.

The methodology of action research (AR) and collaborative action research was used in this project. The method was employed because the “researcher [was] looking for involvement of the participants in data collection and seeking to build rapport and credibility with the individuals in the study.”⁹ The method is defined by three elements: 1) AR is one of the most powerful ways to generate new knowledge; 2) participation

⁹ Creswell, 181.

places a strong value on democracy and control over one's own life situations; and 3) AR aims to alter the initial situation of the group, organization, or community in the direction of a more self-managing, liberated state.”¹⁰ Through collaboration, the researcher joins closely with the participants from the outset. The aim is to transform the social environment through a process of critical inquiry—to act on the world, rather than being acted on.”¹¹

The success of the model is dependent on the learning experienced by the participants and whether the learning led to a transformation of their previous handling of conflicts. The transformation is vital to the goal of developing and utilizing tools that will bring peaceful resolution to disagreements while providing a model in managing future conflicts. Action research was selected because “the action is usually to begin a process of improving in learning, with a view to influencing thinking and behaviors” compared to traditional research whereby “the action is usually to conduct an experiment in which variables are manipulated to check whether it is possible to establish a cause-and-effect relationship.”¹²

The implementation of the model encompassed developing the trust of the participants while exploring the experiences that contributed to unresolved conflicts. The model studies the barriers that fuel disagreements, with a focus on “explicating the ways people in particular settings [the Belfast faith community] come to understand, account

¹⁰ Greenwood and Levin, 7-8.

¹¹ Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 9.

¹² McNiff and Whitehead, 11-12.

for take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situation.”¹³ The model promotes insight and understanding of their personal contributions to conflicts and alternative response methods for conflict resolution.

The resulting data provided insight into the culture of the congregation, its interactions, and the diversity of feelings and expectations. This diversity, “when effectively mobilized, gives a group or an organization a much greater capacity to transform itself.”¹⁴ It was the belief that the method would give the researcher insight relative to demographics; the leadership roles; spoken and unspoken traditions; and the structure of power and authority. This model is useful because it includes a “world view, cultural themes, culture change and adaptation, and social structure.”¹⁵

Measurement

The data collected concerning the experiences of the participants relative to conflicts were organized through methods of triangulation. The study documented the knowledge of participants concerning conflicts and causes; personal involvement; awareness of the Bible and biblical guidance in conflict resolution. The attitudes of the participants were documented through open-ended questionnaires, observations, role playing and group discussions.

¹³ Miles and Huberman, 7.

¹⁴ Greenwood and Levin, 12.

¹⁵ Harry F. Wolcott, *Writing up Qualitative Research: Qualitative Research Methods*, vol. 20 (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990), 32.

Instrumentation

Multiple pre-test (closed and open-ended) survey questionnaires were administered to the participants. The closed-ended questionnaires included the personal demographic questions which focused on gender, age, race, marital status, education, and employment; general questions consisting of seven statements that allowed the participant to rate him/herself when interacting with others, based on a scale of one to five; Bible awareness questions which focused on experiences and awareness of the Bible; church participation questions which focused on church involvement, including stewardship and active participation; conflict questions which focused on the awareness of conflicts; and church conflicts questions which focused on the perceived causes of conflicts, and the personal involvement in church conflicts.

An open-ended questionnaire was administered during the third session whereby the participants were asked to complete the *An Exercise in Resolving Conflict* (Appendix F). It was the intent for the participants, through their prior learning in conflict resolution to give a summary of a personal conflict, their role in the conflict, whether the conflict glorified God, and action taken for reconciliation. Role playing by the participants during the fourth session gave the participants an opportunity to resolve conflicts. Through mock exercises, it was the intent to explore the handling of conflict to gain insight and evidence of transformation and the ability to resolve conflict. The overall purpose of the exercise was to determine if the participants could benefit from the educational element.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

Designing the Research Project

The hypothesis of this ministry project proposed that an educational teaching would help in the transformation of behaviors that cause congregational conflicts within Belfast United Methodist Church which would heal past hurts, encourage evangelism, and provide tools and skills in response to future disagreements. The project was in collaboration with volunteers from the congregation.

The decision was made to conduct the study after serving six months as pastor at Belfast. At the time of the appointment conflicts of theological and other differences were threatening the life of the church. Within two weeks of the appointment, the unresolved conflicts resulted in 40% of the congregation leaving the church. The departing members comprised 60% of the financial offerings. In 1965 unresolved conflicts relating to financial commitment resulted in similar results, including the loss of 50% of its members. The history and presence of unresolved conflicts throughout the Belfast ministry led to the belief that this study was needed to protect the health of the faith community.

Many challenges were experienced during the study. The greatest challenge involved helping the congregation understand the leadership authority and supervisory role of a pastor. This was important because although the church was chartered in 1870

church leaders had not allowed pastors to fulfill their duties as outlined in *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, which acknowledges the supervisory role of the pastor “to help persons find a sense of wholeness.”¹ Some leaders decided not to join the study and attempted to discourage other members from participating. In spite of this obstacle and a continuation of similar challenges, the plans for the study moved forward.

The educational resources would include biblical and secular writings, including focus groups; guest facilitators; media presentations; role-playing; open and closed ended questionnaires. The objective included educating participants on healthy conflict resolution through biblical stories and other educational resources to affect a transformation in the lives of the participants. It was the belief that the participants could use their knowledge and experience to promote a change in the behavior throughout the congregation.

The additional objectives of the project included the following:

1. The increased biblical knowledge and awareness of conflicts and how they were managed to bring honor to God.
2. The knowledge and skills for the healthy resolution of conflicts, and using those skills to facilitate conflict resolution with other members of the congregation.
3. Identifying one major conflict within the Belfast congregation, and resolution of the conflict through discussions, role-playing and commitment to support the ministry through financial responsibility.

¹ Kenneth H. Pohly, *Transforming the Rough Places: The Ministry of Supervision* (Dayton, OH: Whaleprints, 1993), 115.

The study would employ the triangulation design model, which allowed the “mixing of methodological strategies.”²

Implementation

The training would include four informal focus group meetings at Belfast United Methodist Church. The focus group consisted of fifteen members of Belfast who regularly attended worship services. They willingly chose to participate following verbal requests and written announcements in the bulletin. They expressed their awareness of past church conflicts and were interested in exploring solutions to resolve present tensions and possible ways to manage future conflicts. The writer served as the facilitator and observer during the sessions; however two guest facilitators would provide assistance at the third session. All sessions were held during February and March 2011 on Sunday following worship service.

The educational study consisted of four 2-3 hour sessions. A pre-test was administered at the first session. The participants willingly discussed their concerns regarding unresolved church conflicts. The effectiveness of the study was based on their ability to resolve conflicts in written exercises, and their responses during role play of a mock conflicts. The mock conflict exercise was completed during the fourth session which included the participants discussing and selecting a topic for debate. The participants considered seven possible topics before selecting to debate the topic of “pledging” requiring a financial commitment to the church. During 1965, the issue resulted in unresolved conflicts and half of the membership leaving the church. The mock

² Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, 2nd ed. (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 1990), 188.

exercise was also a significant challenge based on the pre-test survey which disclosed thirteen of the fifteen participants opposed pledging and any formal commitment to financially support the church. The debate concluded with the participants voting whether to sign a written statement affirming their financial commitment.

Initial Focus Group Session

The initial session began by summarizing the purpose of the project and encouraging mutual respect through the distribution and review of the “Respect Guidelines” authored by Eric Law.³ The guidelines focus on the rendering of respect and consideration for each person while engaged in the study group (Appendix A). This was followed by a series of pre-test questionnaires, which are “paper and pencil instruments designed to collect particular bits of information from participants within ministry settings.”⁴ The surveys included questions to gather data and information on participant demographics, Bible awareness, conflict awareness, church participation, and issues that cause church conflicts. The intent of the questionnaires was to provide the data and information for the evaluation and measurement of the project. It was the belief that the information would help in understanding the barriers Belfast may have experienced in resolving conflicts and the possible learning needed for the future.

³ Eric H. F. Law, *The Bush Was Blazing but Not Consumed: Developing a Multicultural Community through Dialogue and Liturgy* (Danvers, MA: Chalice Press, 1996), 87.

⁴ William R. Myers, *Research in Ministry: A Primer of the Doctor of Ministry Program* (Chicago, IL: Exploration Press, 1993), 61.

Focus Group Responses to Pre-test Survey

The focus group consisted of fifteen members of Belfast United Methodist Church. The following information was obtained from the Demographic Survey.

1. Ten were married and five were single
2. One male, age 40-50; and one male, age 51-60
3. One female, under age 30; four females, age 40-50; five females, age 51-60; and five females over age 60
4. Ten were employed and five were retired
5. Four had completed some college
6. Two completed college and one completed post graduate

The participants were asked to respond to seven statements from the following General Questions Survey with instructions to “Rate yourself on your experience in your home, work, community or church” [the number 1 represents the highest rating, and 5 represents the lowest rating].

	Do this well			Do not do this well	
I listen patiently to those I disagree with	1	2	3	4	5
I try to understand different beliefs/ideas	1	2	3	4	5
I give others freedom to differ in their opinions	1	2	3	4	5
I give support to leaders for the good of their goal	1	2	3	4	5
I sacrifice “winning” for the sake of unity	1	2	3	4	5
I offer honest feedback to others	1	2	3	4	5
I openly discuss difference and disagreements	1	2	3	4	5

The results from the survey questions are as follows:

Statement 1 – I listen patiently to those I disagree with.

Do this well	Do not do this well
1	13%
2	27%
3	33%
4	13%
5	13%

Statement 2 – I try to understand different beliefs/ideas.

Do this well	Do not do this well
1	27%
2	47%
3	19%
4	0%
5	7%

Statement 3 – I give others freedom to differ in their opinion.

Do this well	Do not do this well
1	27%
2	46%
3	19%
4	7%
5	0%

Statement 4 – I give support to leaders for the good of the goal

Do this well	Do not do this well
1	44%
2	50%
3	6%
4	0%
5	0%

Statement 5 – I sacrifice “winning” for the sake of unity.

Do this well	Do not do this well
1	50%
2	37%
3	13%
4	0%
5	0%

Statement 6 – I offer honest feedback to others

Do this well	Do not do this well
1	62%
2	19%
3	19%
4	0%
5	0%

Statement 7 – I openly discuss differences and disagreements

Do this well	Do not do this well
1	31%
2	31%
3	31%
4	6%
5	0%

The participants were asked to complete a Bible awareness survey containing the following:

Statement 1 – Before joining the church, how many times did you study the Bible?

Never	47%
One to ten	20%
More than ten	27%
Once a week	6%

These results reflect current Bible awareness of the study group.

Statement 2 – How often do you attend Bible study sessions?

Never	60%
Weekly	13%
Not often	27%

These results are consistent with Bible awareness of the study group.

Statement 3 – How often would you like to attend Bible study sessions?

Never	6%
Weekly	67%
Twice Monthly	20%
Not often	7%

These results do not reflect actions and comments of the study group.

Statement 4 – If you do not study the Bible, why:

Hard to understand	47%
Not interested	6%
Not offered	20%
Depend on Preacher	13%

These results are consistent with known comments and practices.

The participants were asked to complete a Conflict Awareness survey containing the following optional statements:

Statement 1 – What are your beliefs concerning conflicts?

Are Normal	94%
Are always harmful	44%
Can be helpful	56%

The results reflect the known comments by the focus group and others.

Statement 2 – What have been your experiences with church conflicts?

Always present	44%
Church dividing	88%
People turn away	88%

The results reflect known comments and perceptions of the study group and congregation.

Statement 3 – How many church conflicts have you experienced in past ten years?

None	31%
1-5	56%
More than 20	13%

Since Belfast has a long history of unresolved conflicts, the results are not consistent with the experiences of the study group.

Statement 4 – How have you responded to church conflicts?

Discussed with pastor	44%
Told other members	38%
Left the church	56%

There was no evidence indicating conflicts were discussed with the pastor.

Statement 5 – How would you suggest responding to church conflicts?

Confer with pastor	78%
Determine basis/origin	18%
Personal and/or group discussions	6%

The responses are not consistent with known practices.

The participants were asked to respond to the following statements concerning church participation/financial giving:

Statement 1 – Length of membership at Belfast UMC

1-5 years	44%
6-15	13%
16-25 years	19%
26-35	19%
36-45 years	5%

The results are consistent with known information.

Statement 2 – How often do you attend church?

Twice a month	6%
More than twice a month	94%

These results are consistent with known information.

Statement 3 – Do you believe in supporting the church through financial resources?

Yes	94%
No	6%

The results are not consistent with the known practices of giving.

Statement 4 – Do you pledge financial resources to the church

Yes	0
No	94%

The results are consistent with known information.

Statement 5 – How does tithing relate to your faith?

Tithing is not related to my faith	38%
I can believe in God without tithing	6%
Tithing shows my faith in God	56%

Based on known information, tithing is not associated with faith.

The following are responses by the participants relative to the following:

Statement: Which of the following may cause church conflicts?

Harmful rumors and gossip	100%
Discomfort with homosexual/gay issues	94%
Personality issues	94%
A select few making all decisions	88%
Formation of cliques	88%
Need to have power and control	88%
Lack of communication between minister/members	81%
Racial/culture issues	81%
Sexual misconduct	75%
Lack of trust	75%
Hurt/anxiety from the loss/transfer of members	81%
Persons who are challenging and disagreeable	75%
Competition	69%
Difficulty in adjusting to changes	69%
Disagreements with church doctrine	69%
Style of worship	63%
Political issues	63%
Feelings of winning or losing	56%
Stewardship and financial commitments	50%
Issues involving participation of youth	50%
Lack of Bible teaching	44%
Presence of persons with criminal background	44%
Presence of persons addicted to illicit drugs	44%
Unresolved family disputes	44%
Lack of recognition	44%

Educational Component

During the initial session some participants were distressed with the anticipated teaching and discussion on church conflicts. As the surveys were completed some participants attempted to argue with others. There were comments that the survey questions were directed specifically to Belfast which presented a teaching opportunity to explain the nature of conflicts in helping the group understand that conflicts have been

present since creation and have no social, culture or economic boundaries. The group was given various scripture to study from the Old and New Testaments that contained evidence of conflict.

The second session began with the review and discussion of the scripture assigned during session one. Several unsuspected challenges surfaced during the session. Most of the participants admitted they had little or no prior Bible knowledge. Two participants expressed disappointment with the lack of Bible foundational training while growing up in the Catholic teaching. Both had difficulty understanding the Bible because of their Catholic orientation and teaching. Several of the participants also displayed the lack of reading comprehension. These circumstances were hindering the genuine learning which “should obviously be a broadening rather than a limiting experience.”⁵ The session focused on discussing the stories of biblical conflicts and steps taken for peace and reconciliation. Participants indicated understanding, but also displayed some discomfort in reading and discussing the Bible texts.

The third session consisted of three parts with the assistance of two facilitators. The first part of the session began with a Power Point presentation on the principles of the “Four G’s” outlined in the Ken Sande book *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*. The principles are based on the premise of reconciliation including emphasis on each person conducting a self-examination evaluating personal efforts in conflict resolution. During the prior sessions comments by the participants indicated conflicts were being resolved through methods of avoidance, withdrawal,

⁵ Thomas Mann, *The Oxford Guide to Library Research*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 186.

overpowering or some form of retaliation. The principle of the 4 G's focused on the goal of developing tools and implementing acts of peace, healing and reconciliation. Each principle was explained and discussed extensively.

The participants were given the handout "Principles of the Four G's" for note-taking and to facilitate learning (Appendix G). An outline of the Principles of the Four G's is listed below:

- I. Practicing the Principles of the Four Gs
 - (Steps necessary for reconciliation)
- 1st G: Glorify God
 - Trusting (Romans 12:19); obeying (Galatians 5:14); and imitating God (Luke 1:79)
- 2nd G: Get the Log Out of Your Own Eye (Matthew 7:5)
 - Look in the mirror/self-reflection
- 3rd G: Gently Restore (Matthew 18:15)
 - Take steps to discuss the matter without confrontation
- 4th G: Go and Be Reconciled
 - Taking steps to repair/restore the relationship

During the second part of the session the participants were separated into three groups with the guests facilitators assigned an individual group. The purpose of the separation was to create smaller groups and to give the participants more attention and support in the completion of written exercises. Initially each participant was presented with *The Peace Maker Checklist* containing the Four G's, which had been explained in the first part of the session (Appendix H). Since the understanding of this information

was important in the completion of the next teaching, the document was explained a second time. The document served as a reference in resolving a mock conflict exercise involving a church member who opposed the purchase of a computer by the pastor. The exercise scenario was explained on the worksheet, *An Exercise in Resolving Conflicts* (Appendix F) was distributed to the participants for their use as they made considered possible action to resolve the pastor/member conflict using the criteria of the Four G's. Although the worksheet stated the conflict involved a pastor and member, some responses indicate the participants viewed themselves as the actors in the script. Overall, the responses reflect participants did not understand the scenario, the instructions or how to associate the teaching of the Four G's. The following is a random sampling of the responses:

1. Give possible comments to glorify God.
 - a. I feel there was a better way to obtain the computer
 - b. Spending a lot of money on one item used part-time is a waste
 - c. Be respectful and aware of my actions
 - d. Is there another way to raise money
 - e. Give the money to missionary in Africa
 - f. Need to ask God how to make my point clear
2. How does one get the log out?
 - a. Ignore the request
 - b. Should respect others
 - c. Look in the mirror

- d. Maybe take donations
 - e. I could arrange to get one for the pastor
 - f. How is the conflict is going to help the church
3. Give recommendations to gently restore.
- a. I am worried about the expenses
 - b. So many other things are needed
 - c. Offer solutions
 - d. Make suggestions
 - e. Take time to talk things over
 - f. Show ways the computer can be used
4. What are possible steps for reconciliation?
- a. Thank you for helping our church
 - b. Words are power
 - c. Do not gossip about situation
 - d. Understand we all have different ideas
 - e. Work towards a compromise
 - f. Yes or no an go forward
5. What did you learn about yourself?
- a. I easily get my feelings hurt
 - b. Patience
 - c. Don't dwell on minor things
 - d. Need to know all details

- e. I am OK with myself
- f. I don't do well in conflict

The fourth session consisted of two parts. The first part began with the distribution of the *Power and Control Worksheet* (Appendix I) for use in completing a written exercise in conflict resolution. Since examples of power and control had been discussed in previous sessions, the participants were asked to discuss their personal use of power and control, which resulted in conflicts. They were asked to complete the worksheet summarizing a personal conflict and the decisions and/or action personally taken toward resolution and reconciliation. A summary of the information to be addressed in the exercise is below.

1. Name/Describe the Conflict
2. Awareness: (what was your role)
3. Initial Reaction/Response
4. Additional Reactions/Responses
5. Did your responses Glorify God
6. Did you take steps to reconcile/repair the relationship
7. Was there repair/reconciliation
 - a. Note: Reconciliation involves imitating God's forgiveness
8. What are your plans for reconciliation

Although the participants were asked to summarize their own use of power and control, their comments focused on the power and control behavior observed in others including the former pastor, former and present members, and employment supervisors.

In responding to their roles, one person walked away from the conflict whereas most of the participants denied playing any role in the conflict. Their responses did not reflect a clear understanding of the exercise. However some members admitted that past conflicts in the church are causing ongoing emotional conflicts, including anger, and bad feelings toward church members and others. Thirteen of the fifteen participants indicated their responses did not glorify God, eleven indicated no action has been taken for reconciliation and eleven expressed no plans for reconciliation.

The second part of the session began with the re-distribution of *The Peace Maker* Checklist (Appendix H). The checklist was used in reviewing and reinforcing the prior session teachings. At the conclusion of the review, the participants were given the opportunity to offer comments and ask questions based on the premise that “people want their opinions to be known, but do not want others to know what they think.”⁶ During the discussion the participants identified and sought guidance in the resolution of the following conflict issues:

1. People continue to carry past and current hurts that cause anger and other conflicts
2. Continued problems from rumors and hearsay
3. Members are unable to talk to others because of fear of retaliation
4. Members feel that the District and Conference have not done anything for Belfast and Belfast should not have to make financial commitments and/or contribute toward the annual church apportionments [financial assessments]
5. Members believe the church is allowing one person total control over the finances

⁶ Nancy Jean Vyhmeister, *Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 160.

6. The belief that the pastor should preach and not be involved in the decisions of church
7. The topic of pledging creates serious conflicts because members have never pledged and do not agree with any type of pledging or formal commitment to the church

There was dialog and discussion relating to each concern followed by a discussion regarding the length of time needed by the participants to resolve each conflict. The participants did not feel issues 1, 2 and 3 can be resolved. They stated that issues 4, 5 and 6 will require several months to resolve to their satisfaction. Although 81% of the participants did not approve of pledging they felt the issue could be resolved. The possible resolution to the issue of pledging was explored by asking for volunteers to participate in a mock role-playing debate on pledging. One person would argue for pledging and the other would argue against pledging. Two separate groups of volunteers participated in the 30-minute mock exercise. The objectives of debate were: 1) help the participants understand how pledging allows the church to plan and implement its ministries, 2) reveal how pledging is connected with biblical principles of keeping vows and serving God, and 3) a measurement as whether the participants could employ the educational element in resolving the conflict.

During the second debate a breakthrough came during the teaching and discussion on Malachi 3:8-10 which reflects the mandate by God for all to display obedience and gratitude through tithes and offerings. Surprisingly, 88% of the participants stated they had no knowledge of the Scripture, and did not know of any similar Bible teaching. One participant stated the new learning convinced her that Christians should tithe or make some other financial commitment to honor God. Another admitted she had been strongly

opposed to tithing however the sessions and the debate discussion changed her mind. The session concluded with a final vote on pledging which resulted in 81% of the participants signing and submitting a written agreement to start pledging immediately.

Focus Group Conclusion

The willingness of the large number of members to participate in this project was an indication of their desire to manage church conflicts. Their lack of Bible experiences and extensive history of conflicts may have limited the understanding of what was expected during the completion of the exercises. There were several inconsistent responses in the completion of some surveys which may indicate the unwillingness for personal growth, or the desire to look inward rather than outward for resolutions.

The participants accomplished a major task in working through the conflict of pledging and made the decision to start their pledging immediately. However, most of the participants were fearful that expressing their learning and the possible change in their beliefs may anger or cause conflicts with other members of the congregation. The group was specifically united in their belief that their decision to pledge would cause tension and conflicts with the rest of the congregation. They felt the decision would be perceived by the congregation as a mandate for pledging by the entire congregation.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, REFLECTIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The purpose of this project was to explore the reasons for unresolved conflicts at Belfast United Methodist Church and encourage educational training to help manage future disagreements. Church conflicts are not coincidental but usually happen after alarms and warnings of an existing problem. In order to resolve conflicts it is necessary to identify the root causes of the problem. It was the belief of the writer that employing an educational element would give insight into the causes of the disagreements. This element was selected because “education leads to changes—changes in the amount of knowledge people have, changes in skills and competencies, changes in the way we communicate and understand each other, changes in our sense of self, and changes in the social world.”¹ This project of learning was a collaborative relationship with Belfast members to explore the opportunity to identify and manage disagreements that may lead to a crisis.

An environment for dialog, trust and effective communication was important because its absence is often the underlining cause of conflicts. Although conflicts are a

¹ Patricia Cranton, *Professional Development as Transformative Learning: New Perspectives for Teachers of Adults* (San Francisco, CA: The Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996), 160.

normal makeup of every organization, they disrupt the focus of the ministry. However, conflicts are opportunities for the growth in faith and transformation. It is the belief that without effective communication unresolved conflicts will remain constant in the church. The existence of the *revolving door* of unresolved conflicts hinders actions of peace and love, and therefore sends messages that discourage believers, while turning away those seeking to know Christ. The church should not expect qualities of peace, caring, and love in others if its members are unable to achieve those qualities. Communication opens avenues for education, which will allow members of the community of faith to experience a transformation in their lives.

The educational component of the project was aided by church members who volunteered to participate as a focus group in a research study of church conflicts. The focus group of fifteen participants expressed lingering pain from the recent conflict that resulted in the loss of one-third of the membership. There was anger, confusion, fear, disbelief, and a need for answers. The focus group would serve as one source to give “specific data [for] use as evidence to test and support an answer to a question.”² One participant stated she felt the opportunity to join the study group would give answers and solutions to the current problems at Belfast. Another stated she felt the sessions would help her handle conflicts in church and the workplace. And another said she wanted to learn steps in keeping Belfast from closing.

Although the six months tenure as pastor did not give insight into all issues, the thoughts of the participants were consistent with the beliefs of others in the congregation. The various comments from the participants and other members led to the belief that

² Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th ed. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 6.

unresolved conflicts existed because of misguided information and mistaken ideas. This condition continues unless “we are able to free ourselves from those who by controlling our beliefs would control our lives.”³ The educational component was designed to give freedom in exploring options for peaceful conflict resolution. The intent was to seek conflict resolution through the understanding of other points of view and the knowledge of peaceful alternatives. The collaboration of the focus group was an opportunity to learn and develop communication skills in response to conflict situations.

Through multiple pre-test questionnaires the focus group had the opportunity to become aware of many types of interpersonal and intergroup conflicts. The completion of the questionnaires provided data and an opportunity for participants to consider personal involvements in conflicts and the possible knowledge and skills for conflict resolution. The educational component explored biblical stories and conflicts of jealousy, anger, violence, peace, healing and reconciliation. However, the lack of biblical understanding by most of the participants required some unscheduled basic Bible teaching. This unforeseen challenge was possible with the aid of visual resources which “help readers better understand the logical structure of information.”⁴

The teaching examined the existence of conflicts in every aspect of life and how they can serve for good and bad. Initially, open discussions led to tension and arguments within the group. The teaching on principles of peacemaking resolved these challenges. The discussions were opportunities to develop and practice skills of patience, respect,

³ Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 7.

⁴ Ibid., 196.

empathy and consideration of the opinions of others. During mock exercises on conflict resolution the group was given the conflict information and a worksheet to write possible actions in resolving the conflicts. In one exercise the participants were asked to summarize their personal role in a conflict, including how the conflict was resolved or should have been resolved. The project concluded with participants engaging in a mock-debate on the topic of pledging and financial commitment.

Recommendations for Possible Adjustments

The purpose of these recommendations is to explore other teachings that could have been useful in this project. As conflict is inherent through society, every culture has its own method of addressing or resolving conflicts. Although the church was created and has the responsibility of establishing and implementing behavior that exemplifies the character of Christ, the church is not immune from conflicts. The church, like other cultures in society, has its own culture, which includes habits, expressions of spirituality and responses to conflicts.

The church suffers the same types of pains, hurts and fractures of every culture, yet society expects to find a state of utopia within the church. The church must come to understand the presence of conflicts and seek solutions to address the condition.

Admitting that we are out of control, that we cannot determine our destiny, we are freed to admit that we sometimes suffer.⁵ Members do not and should not accept the fractures and bruises as testimony of *that is the way the church is*. Since the church mirrors society, the infection of the *me* consciousness is evident throughout every congregation. These realities serve notice that conflicts are inevitable, and each person can play a role

⁵ Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 198.

in responding to disagreements in ways that will glorify God. The Word of God, as delivered by his anointed messengers provides guidance and recommendations in responding to harmful conflicts. Kenneth Gangel and Samuel Canine, in the book *Communication and Conflict Management in Churches and Christian Organizations* remind their readers the importance of Scripture as the primary resource in preparing for conflicts. The resourcefulness of Scripture is emphasized in their summary of various texts, including Romans 12:9-21 whereby they summarize five points from the passage.⁶ A 5-point summary chart prepared from the Gangel and Canine teaching is submitted as Appendix B.

Congregational hurts and fractures often leave lasting damage. Each member of the body of Christ has a responsibility to promote healing and restoration. During October 2011, a Christian Reformed Church in Ontario participated in a pilot program that focused on *restorative justice* that incorporated elements of redemption, support, forgiveness and individual responsibility, which are major components in facilitating the healing process. These and other components were the basis of the promotional emblem design *Helping to Heal Church Conflict*.⁷ The promotional emblem is submitted as Appendix C.

Trends in Church Conflicts

Whereas church conflicts are common, it is argued that the liberal values of our modern day society contribute to greater opportunities for conflicts. People throughout

⁶ Gangel, Kenneth O. Gangel and Samuel L. Canine, *Communication and Conflict Management in Churches and Christian Organizations* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1992), 173-174.

⁷ CRC Newsroom, *Helping to Heal Church Conflict*. Christian Reformed Church, 2011; Available from <http://www.crcna.org/news.cfm?newsid=3122§ion=1>. (accessed November 28, 2011). Inquiry determined that although CRC included the emblem in their publication, the author is not known.

society are less willing to listen to advice, constructive criticism or serve as a follower.

Churches are often places of social networking, immature believers and lack of commitment. These factors make it easy to pack up and leave at the first sign of a conflict or disagreement.

The worldview has promoted a church of self-interest, power, prestige and influence, which are the same obstacles Jesus confronted with the Pharisees and Sadducees. The condition reflects a “world system that rewards and promotes novelty over the familiar, reservation of options over commitment, an ‘open’ future over an accepted past, functional over substantive relationships, what works over doctrine, independence over interdependence and quantitative measures of worth over qualitative measures of worth.”⁸ Regardless of the motives, David Noble, in his article *Church Conflict Forum 2008* writes:

1. More than 19,000 congregations experience major conflict every year.
2. 25% of the churches in one survey reported conflict in the previous five years was serious enough to have a lasting impact on congregational life.
3. Only 2% of church conflict involves doctrinal issues.
4. 98% of church conflict involves interpersonal issues.
5. Control issues ranked as the most common cause of conflict (85%).
6. About 40% of church members who leave their churches do so because of conflict.
7. Very small numbers (16%) of churches report positive outcomes from conflict.⁹

⁸ Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 194.

⁹ David Noble, *Congregational Conflict*, Church Conflict Forum, 2008, available from <http://churchconflictforum.blogspot.com/> (accessed November 26, 2011).

Regardless of the motives, overwhelming evidence supports the premise that conflict in the church continue to inflict serious damage upon the body of Christ.

Reflections

The completion of this project has been an opportunity for personal growth and transformative learning, the concept of employing “reflective action and reflecting on why we are reflecting.”¹⁰ Research on any project requires a thorough investigation of the various components and every aspect of the project. Reflecting questioned every aspect of the project. The depth of the problems at Belfast required a greater understanding of the culture, history, academic challenges, work ethics, family associations, faith practices and maturity. It was equally important to understand the *climate for change*. Prior to this study, more detailed information and strategy should have been evaluated to determine if the setting was open to new ideas, creativity or innovation. In this case, there was evidence and indicators of major obstacles for change. The history of the setting and the existing climate made it “exceptionally difficult to secure broad-based support for the implementation of any proposal for any change in an organization disrupted by adversarial relationships.”¹¹

The information was significant in gaining a greater understanding of the depth of the problem and the amount of time and resources needed for genuine learning and transformation. The additional knowledge would be reason to consider adjusting the teaching and extending the sessions to accommodate those persons who may not be prepared for that pace of learning. It is the belief that the role-playing debate exercise was

¹⁰ Patricia Cranton, *Professional Development as Transformative Learning* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996), 116.

¹¹ Lyle E. Schaller, *Strategies for Change* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 33.

the most effective tool in the teaching and should be considered for future learning. The collaborative interaction was effective in building relationships and should be considered as a valuable faith building resource. When collaborative interaction becomes a common practice, minor problems are less likely to escalate into a crisis. It is the belief that open communication decreases the chances of unresolved conflicts. The interaction and sharing not only serves to strengthen the church family but also can be a resource for strengthening relationships throughout the community. The personal learning experiences from this study created the desire to explore other projects of conflict resolution.

Conclusion

Paul, in Ephesus 4:3 encouraged the believers to “make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” The plea of Paul was in response to the presence of conflicts inherent throughout society. Paul was calling the Ephesians to practice Christian unity through acts of peace, healing and reconciliation. Although the church should serve as an example for unity, disagreements and conflicts “over such issues as abortion rights, sexual misconduct, and the ordination or marriage of homosexuals—have undermined the rational process of congregational and denominational meetings.”¹² This reality calls for reconciliation, a goal in conflict with the goal of Satan.

The entrance of original sin through the first humans who had the desire to achieve personal needs in rebellion against God is assurance of the ever-presence of

¹²Nancy T. Ammerman et al., *Studying Congregations* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 124.

conflict. These conditions have been affirmed throughout human history and continue to impact society and every church. Since sin and conflict have residency in the church as an adversary, God calls upon the church to take action for effective management toward the goal of peace, healing and reconciliation. As stated by Paul Mickey and Robert Wilson in their book *Conflict and Reconciliation*, “reconciliation is a matter of mutual recognition that a conflict is ended.”¹³ The goal involves removal of the pain and suffering and transforming the oppressor.

Transformation allowed reconciliation between and Saul and David; between Peter and the arresting party and came to arrest Jesus; and between Paul and the early Christians. Transformation allowed reconciliation between the Church of England and John Wesley that led to the founding of Methodism. Transformation was evident during the Civil Rights Movement that led to the change in laws that liberated a people from the legalized bondage of segregation. In addition, Liberation Theology provided the opportunity for the liberation of Scripture that addressed the concerns of those suffering from economic, political, social, racial, and gender oppression—which are all traced to the condition of original sin.

That condition is rooted in the victory of Satan in the Garden of Eden which separated every human being from God. This human condition includes a corrupt state of the heart which cries out for reconciliation. The theology of Christianity teaches that God responded to that condition by sending his “only begotten Son.” That reconciliation is expressed in John 1:29 by John the Baptist who identifies Jesus as “the lamb of God that

¹³ Paul A. Mickey and Robert L. Wilson, *Conflict and Resolution: A Case Study Approach to Handling Parish Situations* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1973), 16.

takes away the sins of the world.” The sacrifice of Jesus satisfied half of the requirement for a mutual agreement signifying the end of conflict.

The study of conflict and conflict resolution at Belfast United Methodist Church provides the opportunity to join with other historic movements of transformation. They all share the common methodology of peacemaking and reconciliation which requires the realization that “the only methodology that will work is centered in absolute reliance upon God to change the condition of human hearts.”¹⁴

¹⁴ Dave Peters, *Surviving Church Conflict* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1997), 150.

APPENDIX A
DEMOGRAPHIC CHART

The following spreadsheet provides a summary of the demographics of Belfast members and attendees.

Town/City	Population – 53,000					Med. Family Income
	White	Black	Asian	Hispanic	Other	
Loveland	92.91%	1.68%	2.63%	2.42%	2.70%	\$82,000
Milford	Population – 6284					
	95.08%	0.7%	0.8%	2.3%	0.7%	\$51,000
Owensville	Population – 853					
	94.50%	3.28%	0.25%	1.55%	0.25%	\$41,193
Newtonsville	Population – 492					
	99.59%		0.20%		0.20%	\$18,715

APPENDIX B

FIVE POINT CHART ON BIBLICAL TEACHINGS ABOUT CONFLICT

The following 5-point summary chart, adapted from the teaching of Kenneth Gangel and Samuel Canine on passages from Romans 12:9-12, provides guidance in the use of Scripture for managing conflict.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. (Rom. 12:9-13)	
Point 1	The commands of this passage will produce strong relationships among believers. If the alliances suggested in the passage were allowed to develop, we would not eliminate conflict, but it would help us manage it more effectively.
Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (Rom. 12:16-18)	
Point 2	Each believer has a personal responsibility for being at peace with all men. Our ability to identify with other believers will help us establish a position of harmony. Some people fail to comprehend that one can differ with another, yet need not go to war.
Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.” (Rom. 12:14)	
Point 3	Even when faced with those who persecute you, “bless do not curse.” The imperative mood tells us no options exist here, God expects obedience.
Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. Rom. 12:14)	
Point 4	The ugly side of conflict must not be evident in God’s child. We are constantly tempted to fight using the same tactics as the ungodly, but right behavior still should regulate our conflict relationships.... When engaged in conflict, we need to consider whether we identify with the actions of God or Satan.
Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:19-21)	
Point 5	Since the Lord repays vengeance, we cannot take matters into our own hands. God’s ability to set the record straight far surpasses our puny efforts. We must conquer the evil around us by the goodness God enables us to have.

APPENDIX C

CONFLICT HEALING PROMOTIONAL EMBLEM

The following promotional emblem serves as a reminder of the various components that encourage healing and reconciliation from conflict hurts.



APPENDIX D
RESPECT GUIDELINES

The respect guidelines document presented by Eric Law in his book *The Bush Was Blazing but Not Consumed* is designed to set the stage for respectful and considerate communication by the participants during the sessions.

RESPECT GUIDELINES

R = take Responsibility for what you say and feel without blaming others
(I statements/I wonder../I notice...)

E = use Empathetic listening
(Enter their experience/You do not have to agree)

S = be Sensitive to differences in communication styles
(Silence/stories/Succinct points/Spiral around a topic)

P = Ponder what you hear and feel before you speak
(Think before you speak)

E = Examine your own assumptions and perceptions
(We came to opinions for a reason)

C = keep Confidentiality
(Not secrets/upholds the well-being of the community/they know something shared will not be shared in a way that will hurt them)

T = Trust ambiguity because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong
(By not debating, we can see issues more clearly)

APPENDIX E

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE

The selected text, which include stories of conflicts were distributed to the participants during the first session for their study at home and for discussion during subsequent sessions.

Old Testament

Genesis 4:2-8

Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance [face] fell. The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it." Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him.

Genesis 21:8-10

The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac. (Paran – modern Saudi Arabia)

Genesis 37:3- 4;18

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.... They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him.

1 Samuel 18:6-8

As they were coming home, when David returned from killing the Philistine, the women came out of all the towns of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments. And the women sang to one another as they made merry, "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten

thousands.” Saul was very angry, for this saying displeased him. He said, “They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands; what more can he have but the kingdom?”

1 Samuel 24:10-11

This very day your eyes have seen how the Lord gave you into my hand in the cave; and some urged me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, “I will not raise my hand against my lord; for he is the Lord's anointed.” See, my father, see the corner of your cloak in my hand; for by the fact that I cut off the corner of your cloak, and did not kill you, you may know for certain that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you are hunting me to take my life.

Malachi 3:6-10

For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished. Ever since the days of your ancestors you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, “How shall we return?” Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, “How are we robbing you?” In your tithes and offerings! You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.

New Testament

Matthew 6:14

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

Matthew 16:21-23

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

Matthew 18:15

If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one.

Matthew 26:50-53

Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you are here to do." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?"

Luke 10:30-32

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

John 8:3-5

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught

in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"

Luke 6:35-38

But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

Acts 6:1-2

Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables."

1 Corinthians 3:3-4

For you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely human?

1 Peter 3:8-9

Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

APPENDIX F

AN EXERCISE IN RESOLVING CONFLICTS

The following worksheet was distributed during session three for use in a mock exercise for resolving a conflict concerning the purchase of office equipment in support of the pastor and ministry. The exercise was designed for use in conjunction with the Four G's exercise.

An Exercise in Resolving Conflict

Read the conflict below. Use the checklist and discuss resolving the conflict.

At a business meeting, one member introduced a proposal to buy a computer for the pastor. Another member, the largest financial supporter, opposed the purchase based on the belief that the purchase of a computer was a waste of church money. As the discussion continued, members took sides, and arguments developed. The financial supporter threatened to leave the church if his views were not accepted.

Give Possible Comments to Glorify God.

How Does One Get the Log Out?

Give Recommendations to Gently Restore?

What Are Possible Steps for Reconciliation?

What Did You Learn About Yourself?

Additional Comments:

APPENDIX G

PRINCIPLES OF THE FOUR G's

The teaching on the Principles of the Four G's was incorporated in a power point presentation during the third session. The basic premise of the concept is to facilitate an understanding that conflicts can be used to glory to God, serve others, and for personal growth in Christ.

The Principles of the Four G's

I. Practicing the Principles of the Four Gs

- (Steps necessary for reconciliation)

1st G: Glorify God

- Trusting (Rom. 12:19); obeying (Gal. 5:14); and imitating God (Luke 1:79)

2nd G: Get the Log Out of Your Own Eye (Mat. 7:5)

- Look in the mirror/self-reflection/evaluating personal involvement

3rd G: Gently Restore (Mat. 18:15)

- Take steps to discuss the matter without confrontation

4th G: Go and Be Reconciled

- Taking steps to repair/restore the relationship

II. Practicing the Principles for Overcoming Evil (Rom. 12:14-21)

APPENDIX H

THE PEACE MAKER CHECKLIST

The checklist, presented as a power point lecture during session three, is a useful tool to implement the principles of the Principles of the Four Gs. The checklist was used by the participants during a breakout session for a mock conflict resolution exercise.

The Peacemaker Checklist

Implementing the Principles of the Four Gs

Glorify God (Mark 11:25)

- ☐ Remembering that Jesus' reputation is affected by the way I get along with others
- ☐ Cooperating with God as he prunes me of sinful attitudes and habits
- ☐ Doing everything in my power to live at peace with those around me
- ☐ Asking God to help me to trust him, obey him, imitate him and acknowledge him
- ☐ Using Conflict as an opportunity to serve others

Get the Log Out of Your Eye (Luke 19:8)

- ☐ Overlook minor offenses
- ☐ Am I guilty of reckless words, gossip, slander or some other worthless talk
- ☐ Consider the cost (emotionally, spiritually, ad financially) of continuing a conflict
- ☐ Have I abused my authority
- ☐ Have I respected those in authority
- ☐ Have I treated others as I would want to be treated
- ☐ Have I tried to control others
- ☐ Is there something I desire so much that I am willing to hurt others

Gently Restore (Gal. 6:1,2)

- ☐ Choose a time and place that will be conducive to a productive conversation
- ☐ Plan words carefully in advance, and try to anticipate how others will respond
- ☐ Communicate so clearly that I cannot be misunderstood
- ☐ Use "I" statement
 - "When you do that I feel hurt;" "When you react that way, I think you are angry with me"
- ☐ Talk in person whenever possible
- ☐ Offer solutions
- ☐ State known facts and withhold personal opinions
- ☐ Stay on the present topic, and stop talking once that concern is expressed

Go and Be Reconciled (Eph. 4:2,3)

[With God's Help]

- ☐ Prepare thoroughly for the discussion
- ☐ Affirm respect and concern for the other person
- ☐ Control the tongue and say only what is helpful and beneficial to others
- ☐ Keep doing what is right no matter what others do to me
- ☐ I will not dwell on this incident
- ☐ I will not talk/gossip to others about the incident
- ☐ I will consider my personal contribution to the problem
- ☐ Remember how much God has forgiven me
- ☐ Saying positive things to and about the person whom I have forgiven

Reprinted or adapted from *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, Ken Sande (Baker Books, 3rd ed., 2003), 263-69.

APPENDIX I

POWER AND CONTROL WORKSHEET

The following worksheet was distributed for use in an exercise during session four. The participants were presented with a written conflict situation and asked to respond using Appendix F and G.

POWER AND CONTROL EXERCISE

All of us have been involved in conflicts of power and control which may have resulted in harm or damage. Reconciliation is a process to repair or reunite after a conflict.

Examples: The need to hold leadership positions; unwillingness to train/prepare others for leadership; have to be the spokesperson; withholding information; forming cliques or elite groups; the need to be involved in all matters; withholding tithes/offerings or needing to decide how money is spent; supporting others who are harmful; the need to offer advice; the need to pass along information that may hurt others; boasting about personal financial or other contributions made to the church or others.

Consider an incident when you used power and control and answer the following:

Name/Describe the Conflict: Give details of the incident or situation that made this a conflict).

Awareness: What was your role? How did you become involved?

Initial Reaction/Response: Explain what happened. What did others do? What did you do?

Additional Reactions/Responses: Explain what else others did. Explain what else you did.

Did your responses Glorify God? (i.e. prayer for humility and wisdom; planning your words carefully; anticipating likely reactions and planning appropriate responses; choosing the right time and place to discuss the conflict; assuming the best about the other person until all facts proved otherwise; listening carefully; speaking only to build others up; asking for feedback from the other person; recognizing your limits.)

Yes_____ No_____ If yes, give details.

Did you take steps to reconcile/repair the relationship? Yes_____ No_____

Was there repair/reconciliation? _____

If yes, what were the results:

If no, briefly explain why not:

What are your future plans for reconciliation? Name the specific action you will take. When will you start? How long will it take?

Note: Reconciliation involves imitating God's forgiveness (not dwelling on the incident; not bringing up the incident again/using it against the person; not talking to others about the incident; not letting the incident hinder your personal relationship).

Reprinted or adapted from *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, Ken Sande (Baker Books, 3d ed., 2003). © Peacemaker® Ministries.
www.Peacemaker.net.

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